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By

KIM A. HARRIS
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CHASING THE SHADOW:
A HEURISTIC LOOK AT READER-RESPONSE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

_____

Michael Angelotti, Chair

_____

John Chiodo

_____

Priscilla L. Griffith

_____

Mark Letcher

_____

Courtney Vaughn

DEDICATION

With deep and abiding love I

dedicate this work to my

mother, Mary Magdalene Farmer Fulton,

and my father, Glen Stanley Fulton

who taught me valuable

life lessons that included the

importance of education.

Without you, I would never have reached

for greater and greater educational heights.

Your love and belief in me have been my inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

What is the experience of reader-response from the learner's and teachers' perspectives? The purpose of the research reported here was to explore the students' and teachers' perspectives regarding literature and the reader-response experience adding their voices to the English/language arts debate.

Student and teacher perspectives are determined here by utilizing the Moustakas (1990) six-stage heuristic research design: *initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.* Student perspectives are determined through in-depth analysis of student responses to writing prompts, transcribed interview discussion, and observations of student discussions. Teacher perspectives are determined through in-depth analysis of teacher observations, interactions, and dialogue.

Findings suggest the existence of a *concrete manifestation* of the reader-response experience, the necessity of *authenticity* and *relatedness* while reading and the desire to transfer knowledge acquired to others. While elements of the reader-response experience may be extracted from student depictions, this research shows that the *environment* in the English/language arts classroom is foundational to an extreme reader-response experience. *Authenticity* and *relatedness* alone will not offer a deep connection with the prose in the absence of a personal connection with the people in the *environment* in which the reader-response exploration takes place. An *environment* of nurtured acceptance and respect is foundational in cultivating a connected classroom reader-response experience.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter outlines the personal teaching experiences that lead me to this study. In narrative style, I describe the forces that drove my interest in this quest and outline the heuristic research methodology. I also describe the personal nudging that pushed me toward the research question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and the teachers' perspectives?*

Background

I'm fighting a shadow
that steals past the light,
That mocks me
and molds me
and beckons
my flight!
(Copp, 1965)

One year after returning to the university to add the additional hours necessary to teach in the public school setting and a Bachelor of Education degree to my resume, I was standing in front of my own classroom in a freshly pressed pink floral print dress, waist cinching suntan hose, and navy blue Naturalizer pumps. I sported the "big hair" common of the early 90's. On that first August day in 1992 as an Orbit (pseudonym) faculty member, I actually stood before several classrooms. In this traditional K-12 district totaling 342 student members (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1992-1993), I was a departmental teacher of upper elementary and junior high school students. I stoically recited the same stone carved script to six classes. I was a full-fledged, full-time teacher. Due to my academic background that boasted a bachelor of science, a bachelor of education, a master of science, and a master of education, I had been able to skip student teaching; so there I was,

frightened, anxious, and proud all at the same time. Now what was I supposed to do? I knew that I was to be a teacher. My adopted, yet subconscious motto became, "When a teacher, do as teachers do". This motto brought me face to face with my educational experiences in both public schools and college institutions. Teachers were—what? Authoritative, confident, and smart. Since I had no depth of knowledge but took pride in preparation, I could wing that smart thing and even the confidence if approached on a day-to-day basis. Then certainly I had to be authoritative since the other two elements of my teacher façade I perceived as acts. If I was authoritative I wouldn't have discipline problems. My teachers never had discipline issues, and I knew why after watching them control the environment for years. An intuitive sense that learning is connected to the environment had not yet emerged. It would be months before that uneasiness began and years until I discovered the works of Deci & Ryan (1985, 2002) and Pollak & Freda (1997) who validated my emergent uneasiness with the direct instruction, dictative approach.

On this first school day I was prepared—or at least as prepared as I could be without the experience of student teaching. I had practiced this day in front of the mirror in the dining room of my home for one week. I had pages of notes, expectations, grading policies, punishments, and most importantly, I had the textbook! Things progressed as smoothly as they can for a traveling rookie teacher on that first day. Smoothly, that is, until I encountered the class that the superintendent had earlier warned of saying,

> You know…, I would put you anywhere else if I could, but I can't. I simply have no where else to put you. The schedule just won't allow it.

He continued telling me that this class he spoke of was an eighth grade English/language arts class, all boys, and they gave everyone fits. To this I replied, "Don't worry. It'll be fine".

My prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach to classroom management didn't hit any homeruns with these boys' active, egocentric style—neither did my rote, antiseptic, and sterile teaching method. Today I know that a little positive humor would have made the environment more tolerable, addressed socialization needs, and enhanced learning (Pollak & Freda, 1997, Glasser, 1996), but back then I thought nothing of such a frivolous academic endeavor. I'm sure my students would have learned more and enjoyed the time we spent together had I utilized an authentic teaching style that provided students with real and present world activities. I did not know, however, that "No more deadly harm can be done to young minds than by depreciation of the present" (Whitehead in Cahn, 1997, p. 263). An historical educational investigation may have led me to Rousseau who contended that students discover through active experience and sensations. These authentic experiences, he believed, promote higher order thinking known as reasoning (Rousseau, 1969). John Dewey could have shared with me, through the medium of the printed word, the notion that student activity would promote interest and motivation for learning. Perhaps discovery of his idea that "Somehow and somewhere motive must be established between the mind and its material" (Dewey, 1902, p. 34) would have awakened me, but it is doubtful. I had, after all, been required to take psychology classes for my recently acquired educational degree. These classes touched upon Piaget whose assertions rested on research that indicated children construct

knowledge as they explore their environment (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was not omitted from these classes. I had been exposed to the idea that a child's intellectual growth is enhanced as he or she interacts in authentic ways with members of their society (Vygotsky, 1962).

Dropped into the new and foreign world of teaching, I had no time for reflection or research beyond the daily demands of the profession. If I had only paused long enough to recall my own childhood experiences, I would have known that "The present contains all that there is" (Whitehead in Cahn, 1997, p. 263). Such reflection may have led me to adopt Wiggins (1989) authentic assessment approach rather than my rote experiential method Lortie (1975) called the "apprenticeship of observation". As a floundering rookie, I was unaware of these theorists. Now a fourteen-year veteran, I recall my entry year with wonder. It is a powerful influence that personal student experiences had on my teaching style. I can attest that my observation of teachers was a more commanding predictor of my methodology than formal teacher education programs. I can also say that had I been familiar with Wiggins (1989) assertions that authentic learning should represent a performance in the field of study and assessment should compare student performance against student known standards, my perceptions of what I should be doing in the English/language arts classroom might have been somewhat different on that first day of school. Rather than evaluate every student paper, I would have taught students to evaluate and revise their own work. Today I know the value of self-reflection and the extended learning that it brings, but at that time, I would have seen such an act as shirking my duties. With this narrow perspective, I believed that it was my duty to

not only grade all papers but command all settings. I would never have turned over the stage to students as Wiggins suggested allowing them to publically present collected information. I was too busy holding court and meeting my perceived duties and responsibilities of teaching to think of such a thing. I would have seen myself as a disgrace to the profession. Today I am ashamed that I was so easily pliable. I had been unwittingly manipulated by my own apprenticeship as a student in a socialized culture. At the time, I believed that I was doing my job—and doing it well.

As the weeks turned into months, my eighth grade students became more and more complacent about their grades in English/language arts class. I began to question why? Was I really doing my job well? I began to evaluate the course description of an English/language class—not the school course description for there was none, but rather my own perception of what an English/language arts class was supposed to be. I returned to my own roots mentally revisiting personal experiences in the English/language arts classroom. I contemplated what I had studied there. My classes had been filled with the study and identification of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs—all parts of speech. Studying simple, compound and complex sentences had been only a dull momentary reprieve from the norm in my classes. I recalled how unenthused I had been in those courses. I eventually recalled the element that, to me, had enlivened the English language arts classroom. Reading. Reading had brought color to my confinement. Mrs. Goddard had read to my class each day for about ten minutes following the lunch break. It was the best ten minutes of my day. During that time, I relaxed and became absorbed in the world of the characters. Perhaps reading, I thought, would erase the complacency that held my eighth grade

students. During that first year, I began reading to my class approximately ten minutes a day following roll call. They too seemed to relax. They also seemed more focused. I noticed that students wanted to talk about the problems of the characters or the inconsistencies they found in the plots. They always started a discussion by either posing a question or remarking about an event. Often they dubbed the actions of characters as "dumb". After a brief period of class discussion, I would move on to the Silver Burdett & Ginn English (1988) text leaving the chosen trade book behind along with my students' interests. After all, I then believed that I had allowed students to get the class "off-topic" with nonsensical issues. Unaware of Louise Rosenblatt (1938), I was oblivious to the "transactions" that were occurring in my classroom. Students were connecting the words from the printed text with their own backgrounds. They were bringing into focus "memories, personal experiences, feelings, [and] images called to mind by, but not contained in, the texts read" (Probst, ED, 333 446, p. 5). These transactions were bringing personal meanings to the forefront for my students. Naturally, they wanted to discuss these "life to text connections" (Cochran-Smith, 1984), yet the "apprenticeship of observation" mode that I was in told me that the core of the English/language arts classroom was grammar. Students were not interested in my grammar for grammar's sake approach. It was difficult to convince them that they needed to know this information. Perhaps an intuitive sense told my students that teaching grammar in context was a much better approach (Weaver, 1996). Whatever the reason, my exhaustive rhetoric did not bring added interest for my students. It was their lack of interest in grammar that initialized my reflective quest to understand the role of reader-response in the

English/language arts classroom. The continuation of this quest took place, however, twelve years later.

The growth of this research question, following a dormant period and job change, developed in the early morning hours. After an eight year run as a teacher at Orbit, I was now an eighth grade English/language arts teacher at Middletown City Schools (pseudonym). My students populated a small town of 15,691 (Middletown Area Chamber of Commerce, 2003). This K-12 district produced an average daily membership (ADM) of 2551.35 (Middletown City Schools, 2000-2001). Although I had been at Middletown for three years, I was still adjusting to the a-cultural expectations of the community as I pondered the lesson for the day. Behind the desk in my upstairs eighth grade classroom, I began contemplative. I sat trying to formulate a lesson that my English/language arts class would engage in. No longer a devotee of the grammar for grammar's sake approach, I had expanded my teaching repertoire to include language, literature, and composition. My choice of lessons had expanded, yet no matter the category selected from the triad, with twelve years teaching experience I knew that if students would not engage, then they would not truly "get" the topic. The buzzing of the floor buffer hummed up and down the exterior hallway and seeped its way into the classroom atmosphere and into my psyche. My cognitions hummed with wonderings. My eighth grade English/language arts class had been holding out on me. They would not engage with the literature we had explored. They would not critically evaluate the information presented in our anthology and personal connections seemed nonexistent. We had only been in school a few weeks, so perhaps my expectations were too high. Their

standardized test results did reveal that many were poor readers, but maybe these deficiencies were not the culprit. Perhaps they just needed more time to become familiar with the classroom culture and then they would engage. By this time, I was familiar with Freire's literacy model that involves social, cultural, and political literacy components. Freire's model asserts that language and literacy involve the acts of reading but that "Reading the world always precedes reading the word and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire, 1987, p. 35). Were my social or literal actions or inactions as the students' model circumventing the engagement process, or were students' own actions or inactions circumventing the engagement process? As I wandered down this mental corridor, my mind began to take alternate paths. It buzzed connecting with the expectations of a literature class that I was taking at a local university. There I was expected to write a paper over the reader-response theories of Richard Beach and James Marshall (1990) and Richard Beach (1993). This demand would be met much later. The semester had only begun, but I had started reading the two required texts. I wondered if there was anything in them that would assist my students in engaging with their anthology. Perhaps I would try the experiential perspective that I had read about in Beach (1993). Not today, I determined. I needed to read more about that myself. Today would be the tried and untrue lesson plan. In my eighth grade English/language arts class, we would discuss, as much as students would allow, the "Review and Assess" questions at the end of the story. Subconsciously I reverted to the "apprenticeship of observation" mode and text-centered responses demanding that students frame their

answers around the text in a somewhat unnatural manner for middle level students (Martinez, Roser, in Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003).

As the weeks wore on, students continued not to engage with the text while I became more and more engaged with the Beach and Marshall (1990) and Beach (1993) texts. I also became more concerned with the prospect of having to write a paper over reader-response theory in that college class I was taking. The more I read and reflected, the more apparent it became that all I knew about reader-response was a superficial knowledge of the Beach and Marshall (1990) and Beach (1993) theories that I had been studying. They made logical sense, but I did not have a personal understanding of my own reader-responses. Additionally, I did not understand why the class I had taught as a rookie twelve years earlier would not engage with their Silver Burdett and Ginn (1988) grammar text, but would engage with the books that I read to them. It was the combination of these events that led me to this reader-response inquiry.

This research will study the facets of the reader-response experience. Realizing my need to better understand my own reader-responses and those of my students before I could hope to guide pupils in a depth of literary engagement, a personal inquiry is necessary. I will utilize the Moustakas (1990) Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications approach that does not separate the researcher from the study. Considering both the student and teacher perspectives as I examine the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and the teacher's perspectives,* I hope to cast light on the shadow that mocks me for I refuse to take flight.

This qualitative research will not provide a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all strategy, however, perusal of this study may fortify those seeking to understand reader-response. Perhaps some degree of motivation will prevent the apathy that accompanies defeat. Ultimately, my wish is for this document to reach those who seek to improve the discipline of English language arts through literature, language, and composition in the schools across our land. Much too often, the fate of the English/language arts curriculum is left to bureaucratic entities far removed from the students and teachers but closely attuned to their own agendas. "As a political strategy, the rhetoric of crisis, of decline and failure, sets the stage for employing the rhetoric of reform" (Ruth in Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003, p. 88) for bureaucracies and their benefactors. I hope that this inquiry might set the stage for hearing the voices of those most closely affiliated with education and the educational institution—students and teachers.

In the 1990's, California legislators utilized political rhetoric and power to infringe upon the language and literature components of English/language arts. Their actions required public schools to focus introductory reading instruction on explicit phonics and spelling. Additionally, these new laws required that teachers be re-trained in phonics-based instruction (Ruth in Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003, p. 87)

Since the 1990's, government intrusion on the English/language arts curriculum has not waned. In 2003, State Superintendent Sandy Garrett began a five year long plan for professional development for Oklahoma teachers. The plan cited the desire to increase achievement on Oklahoma Core curriculum tests as a focus of

the program. Still an active project, English/language arts teachers will receive extensive training in standards-based instruction, curriculum alignment and mapping, standards and testing alignment, data-driven decision making, and instruction for closing the achievement gap during the 2005-2006 school year (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2005).

Florida Governor Jeb Bush applied pressure for more rigorous reading standards in his state. "The Middle Grades Reform Act" implemented in 2004 was soon followed by additional phonics based college course requirements for Florida's education candidates.

As policymakers via for influence and power in a cyclical and highly charged arena, teachers and their students attempt to follow mandates, implement reforms, and meet standards set for them by outside bureaucracies. If history holds true to form, the mandates, reforms, and standards of today will be replaced by the mandates, reforms, and standards of tomorrow designed to positively influence or perpetuate the political life of their promoters. The shame of it all is that none of these mandates, reforms, or standards rise to the measure of the authentic English/language arts experience (defined by Dewey, Piaget, Rousseau, Vygotsky, Whitehead, and Wiggins). Rosenblatt (1938) argued that the transactional experience does not reside in any textual form and can never be extracted as a complete unit. The key to the response, rather, is found in the transaction between the text and the reader. Thus, the authentic reader-response experience that positively influences comprehension test scores can not be forced through mandates, reforms, or standards, but may only be attained through authentic personal experience. For this reason, the personal

experiences of students and teachers must be considered as school reform measures mount.

Need for the Study

Of all the disciplines explored in the United Stated public school system, none impact lives more personally than English/language arts. A broad discipline, English/language arts includes the triad of language, literature, and composition. Through the elements of this triad, students can explore the Cherokee river bottoms with Wilson Rawls, frolic alongside Plum Creek with Laura Ingalls Wilder and ponder the injustices of the pre-Civil War South with Harriett Beecher Stowe. They can evaluate the world of characters and make connections with their own world. Through the triad, they can explore for pleasure, comfort, escape, or knowledge. It is English/language arts skills that adults use to assess their electric bills and medical test results, interstate road signs, and food labels. English/language arts is a lasting knowledge base used in every walk and stage of life. Perhaps this is why such great emphasis has been placed on English/language arts.

Today no public school discipline is more closely scrutinized than the reading component of literature and language. Federal and state legislatures, task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental organizations follow the reading programs of the public schools. These entities look at reading skills and reading competencies, the preferred methods of teaching reading, and the theories behind them. Everything from phonological awareness and word decomposition to literacy and reader-response are under scrutiny. Cries for instructional reform have gained greater attention in the last several years. Few demands, however, have

focused on the authenticities of the reading and learning experience of the students and the authenticities of the reading and teaching experiences of the practitioner. Instead, mandates upon the discipline have amounted to a hodgepodge of reforms that spring to life along with the political lives of their benefactors.

All too often, English/language arts reform amounts to more time on the task of reading, greater amounts of required testing, the purchase of computer software programs designed to measure students' reading performances, added training for teachers, and curriculum alignment. The misguided thinking fueling these reforms eventually settles upon the desire for inflated public perception that will prolong the political lives of their benefactors rather than an authentic desire to learn more from students and teachers.

The challenge that today faces the English/language arts discipline is the task of validating the learners' and the teachers' places in the field. A bureaucratic entity that includes federal and state legislatures, task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental organizations now have control of the discipline. It is their philosophies and agendas that today drive the reforms and mandates passed down to students and teachers. These voices have a greater impact on the English/language arts curriculum, assessment instruments, and teaching philosophies and methodologies than do the students and the teachers. While bureaucratic entities conduct ongoing scuffles debating and implementing the correct mandate or reform that will force the correct theoretical approach to English/language arts instruction, the learner and the teacher are left in the lurch.

Kerry Course, second grade teacher in Vermont spoke of the recent reading and language arts mandates implemented in his state as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act. "If you focus on (the program) you miss out on the incidental learning. Sometimes that's lost and I think that's sad because discussion is where kids learn the most, participating and having those discussions" (McKenna, 2004, p. 1). Mandated programs strip creativity, natural interest and teachable moments from the classroom reducing professional educators to puppeteers of the bureaucracy. This act of puppeteering concerns me. It troubles me that anyone could believe that a proper approach to the discipline of English/language arts could omit the voices of the learner and the teacher, yet those voices are today unrecognized. Although the National Education Association (NEA) passed resolutions that oppose high-stakes testing and called for changes in the No Child Left Behind Act (Neill, 2003), even proposing a lawsuit against No Child Left Behind, their collective voice continues to be unheard. It confounds me to know that English/language arts teachers, who experience the nuances of learners and learning styles and are privy to some of the effects of literature, language, and composition on their students are not regularly and systematically consulted with regard to the discipline.

It is important to remember that teachers are long-time readers. They too have reader-responses. By understanding their reader-responses, or utilizing prior memories as they recall former classroom reader-responses, teachers' voices could be valuable. None, perhaps, may be as valuable as the recalled, observed, and analyzed experiences of students whose time is dedicated to reading in the public schools on a daily basis. Reflective analysis though, reveals the political and elitist nature of the

beast. Students cannot vote and they do not pay taxes. They have no culturally appointed power; no earned title of respect. They belong to no local action-oriented organizations. There is, however, no better consultant to shed light on the experience of reading than an active reader. What are they interested in reading? What interests them in continuing the act of reading? What connections occur during the act of reading?

While angered, I am not naïve. I, like Dewey, do not believe that there is any place for "sheer self-activity…" (Dewey, 1902, p. 39) in the English language arts discipline. For this reason, the voices of all factions must be heard if the English language arts discipline is to impact lives. It is with this belief that I assert that a heuristic study of reader-response must be conducted. Students' and practitioners' voices must be added to the debate. The political entity that now drives the discipline of English/language arts must hear the reading experiences of the students and teachers. Without their voices, all is futile effort, for it is authentic intrinsic motivation that propels human efforts to greater achievement. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), successful learning experiences are tied to self-determination. The internal drive "motivate[s] an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer optimal challenges" (p. 32). The motivation process moves forward in a self-propelling manner that leads to growth.

In the English/language arts classroom where an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer inevitably leads to question, discovery, reflection, and critical thinking, students' and teachers' intrinsic motivations should be welcomed and embraced. Bureaucratic mandates, though, utilize extrinsic motivations in order

to achieve their goals. These extrinsic pressures "motivates a different, and generally inferior, type of learning" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 124). No matter the number of officials elected, task forces convened, university calls to actions, empirical research documents recorded, school administrator requirements, parental organization demands, dollars allocated, or mandates, reforms, or standards imposed, the experience of reader-response will never be wholly explored and understood without the voices of students and the teachers. May this study allow their voices to be heard for the good of the English/language arts discipline.

Research Question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives?*

The Clark Moustakas (1990) heuristic research method requires the researcher to focus on one research question that is "stated in simple, clear, and concrete terms" (p. 41). As development of the question progresses, "associations and personal experience bring the core of the problem into focus" (p. 41). This "question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or theme" (p. 41). Open-ended collection methods capitalize upon the researcher's intense interest and are vital in stabilizing and insuring holistic concentration on the topic.

Because of my intense interest in the reader-response process, my desire to understand the phenomenon in a holistic manner, and the personal and non-replicable nature of personal experience, the Moustakas heuristic method proved to be a better choice for this research than a purely phenomenological approach. Duke's (1984) phenomenological design I first considered requires that reviewer's experiences match the findings of the primary researcher. The uniqueness and non-replicable

nature of my personal experiences quickly revealed the Moustakas (1990) approach to be a superior design for my purposes.

Adhering to the Moustakas (1990) research design, the inquiry question should: (1) reveal the essence of a phenomenon of human experience, (2) discover, through qualitative means, the dimensions of the phenomenon, (3) engage the total individual and evoke personal and active engagement. This method (4) avoids predicting or revealing causal relationships, and acquires (5) illumination through creative renderings and (6) creative synthesis (p. 42) to elicit a more holistic understanding of the experience.

Guided by the Moustakas model, I realized that more specific research questions regarding reader-response could not be answered until the general question was addressed. It, therefore, was important to limit the realm of this study. This research focuses on the single question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and the teachers' perspectives.*

Limitations of the Study

Because heuristic research is a personal study, this inquiry can not be duplicated. Life is an ever-changing experience. One's present beliefs are based on present knowledge. As new knowledge is acquired with the passage of time, beliefs too evolve for life itself has evolved. For this reason, the essence of heuristic research is an emergent one driven by personal and intuitive feelings. By connecting experientially with elements of the inquiry, the researcher finds new meaning, derives new understandings, and determines new areas for exploration. A walk across the floor of a gymnasium or the smell of a letter jacket can help the researcher make new

connections and send him or her on an alternate but related path of study. This personal inquiry allows the investigator to access the hidden territories of tacit knowledge. This tacit knowledge, or a "sense of unity or wholeness of something [illuminated by] an understanding of the individual qualities or parts" (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 20-21) produced will not be quantifiable. Numerical data will not be crunched in an effort to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis or produce a significant difference. By design, a heuristic will not offer a how-to approach that includes prescriptive lists or causal correlations. The combined study of the learners' and teachers' perspectives, however, could expand English/language arts discussion. On a personal front, I hope this research will restrain the shadow that mocks me, motivate other educators to fight the apathy aroused by continuous extrinsic bureaucratic pressures, and positively impact the English language arts discipline.

Summary

This chapter presented the situations and life experiences that led me to this research topic. It outlined the study from a personal standpoint as well as from the broader social context. Next, I introduced the research question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and the teacher's perspectives.* Finally, this chapter described the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter two provides the results of an academic search conducted to better understand the experience of reader-response from the student's and the teachers' perspectives. It outlines the social and cultural issues that affect the English language arts discipline today. Finally, this chapter provides an account of the theories and philosophies related to this inquiry.

Literature Review

Of all the disciplines explored in the United States public school system, none impact lives more than English/language arts. A broad discipline that includes literature, language, and composition, people utilize their English/language arts knowledge on a daily basis. Only during the last decade, has research revealed the true importance of English/language arts. Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin's (1990) research point to the reciprocal influence of reading literature. Their findings reveal that a student's success or failure with literature might contribute to the academic experiences of some children. According to Cunningham and Stanovich (in Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003), "efficient acquisition of reading skills yields faster rates of growth in reading achievement and other cognitive skills" (p. 672). Donna Godfrey, secondary math teacher at Tualatin High School in Oregon agrees. She says that students "can't do math problems without being able to read effectively. And it's interesting," she notes, "because the kids in the higher math classes, there's a correlation: Most are also in the advanced English and most are also very strong readers" (Lopez, 2004, p. 3). It is a frightening notion that success or failure in the

English/language arts discipline can influence a child's cognitive abilities and academic life to such a high degree.

If reading experiences with literature affect cognitive skills, then the reading experience is important. It is often in the school system that positive or negative reading experiences are fostered. In public schools, the English/language arts discipline bears a great deal of pressure and undergoes a great deal of scrutiny. Federal and state legislatures, task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental organizations rely on public school institutions to prepare students to meet their own needs and the needs of an ever changing, dynamic language and society.

We presently hear an array of voices of federal and state legislatures, task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental organizations proclaiming the importance of reading instruction, and undoubtedly reading instruction is important, however, we have rarely heard from those this reading instruction touches most—the students. In fact, students' voices go unheard so often, Cook-Sather (2002) believes that "If we are really to listen—and respond—to students' perspectives on their experiences of school, we (as teachers and researchers) must make some major shifts in the ways we think and in how we interact with students".

This study seeks students' perspectives by investigating the experience of reader-response from the students' and teachers' point of view. A search of the EBSCO Host provided 103,433 finds for the word *reading* yet provided only 23,568 finds for the word *reader*. This search indicates that there have been greater attempts

to understand *reading* than the *reader*. Are these found documents representative of the needs and perspectives of readers, or are the needs and perspectives of the readers in conflict with these documents? While these findings may accurately represent the needs and perspectives of readers, the fact that these questions remain unanswered suggests the need to include the reader in the reading by studying the reading experience from a perspective that includes students' viewpoints. "Solution comes only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light" (Dewey, 1902, p. 7). With this study I seek to study the students' point of view shedding fresh light on the reader-response experience.

Relevant Philosophy of John Dewey

John Dewey (1902), in The Child and the Curriculum, provided educators with what he believed to be the foundational implements for education. Dewey believed that first and foremost, educators must be cognizant of the world of the child and the very personal nature of all elements that concern the child.

> The child lives in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts. Things hardly come within his experience unless they touch, intimately and obviously, his own well-being, or that of his family and friends. His world is a world of persons with their personal interests, rather than a realm of facts and laws." (Dewey, 1902, pp. 8-9)

Traditional public schools that prevail in the United States today utilize an autocratic or top-down methodology for instruction. This approach offers children a set of facts and laws to be learned and retained. This autocratic method disregards the egocentric nature of the child pitting the child against the curriculum, or the individual nature of the child against the social cultures in which the child exists

(Dewey, 1902, p. 8). The facts and laws that the child must accept and retain often do not relate to the child's world and are not presented in a manner that links them with life relevancy for the child. Dewey points to the child's previous knowledge and experiences as the foundations to which new information should be attached.

According to Dewey (1902), education should be a personalized endeavor. This personalized endeavor he called a journey. The teacher's job is to categorize useful information and present it to children in a way that suggests life relevancy and attaches to the life experiences of the children. Dewey contended that information offered to children without this proper context interrupts the journey, provides no motivation, and, therefore, stifles the learning process. Information provided in the proper life-linked context, he believed, motivates learning. "Somehow and somewhere motive must be appealed to, connection must be established between the mind and the material" (Dewey, 1902, p. 34). Without motivation, Dewey viewed instruction as mechanical and dead.

Surely John Dewey would have been disappointed by the prescriptive do's and don't that litter educational publications today and line the walls of classrooms. "How To" manuals and teacher's guides are scattered across this land. Promising to help teachers help students, these instructional anthems are popular, yet

> the only question is whether [the learning connection] be such as grows out of the material itself in relation to the mind, or be imported and hitched on from some outside source. If the subject-matter of the lessons be such as to have an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child, if it grows out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities, then no device or trick of method has to be resorted to in order to enlist 'interest'… " (Dewey, 1902, pp. 34-35)

Dewey (1902) defined the interest that he spoke of as that which is "placed in the whole of conscious life so that it shares the worth of that life (p. 35).

The apparent failures of our public schools today begin with the implementation of federal, state, and local mandates for reform that prescribe a one size-fits all approach to education. Without knowing the students that inhabit the classrooms, the narrow and personal world of each child, and the motivations and interests of each child, mandates for reform can not succeed in meeting the personalized needs of the children.

Dewey's approach to education is one that places children's inherent tendencies and needs at the top of the list of educational considerations. That, I think, is a fitting location for the beginning of reform in public schools today.

Relevant Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead

In The Aims of Education, Alfred North Whitehead (in Cahn, 1997) provided his magnum opus for education. There Whitehead discussed the importance of purpose and unity in education. "There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations" (p. 265). Like Dewey, Whitehead proposed an educational approach that does not isolate lessons taught from natural life. Furthermore, he contended that one discipline should not be taught in isolation from another. "The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum" (p. 265). He suggested instead a unified educational approach teaching important topics in the context of real-life applications.

My experience suggests that students do not live their lives in compartments but rather approach the various aspects of life through interconnection. Segregating lessons taught from natural life, or segregating one discipline from another, thrusts students into a foreign existence for which they have no frame of reference. Not experiencing life compartmentally, they do not know how to react to such a stratisfication, nor do they have experience with assimilating and accommodating bits and pieces of classroom lessons with life experiences. Without this assimilation and accommodation ability, they have no application for the newly formed knowledge and no interest in it. Whitehead believed interest to be an important element of learning.

> There can be no mental development without interest. Interest is the sine qua non for attention and apprehension. You may endeavor to excite interest by means of birch rod, or you may coax it by enticement of pleasurable activity. But without interest there will be no progress. (in Cahn, 1997, p. 268)

Lack of interest, Whitehead thought, negatively impacts the learning and disrupts the human yearning for knowledge. Placing the student at the center of the educational equation, Whitehead contended that students' minds are ever-changing within a state of perpetual activity.

> The mind is never passive; it is a perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life until you have sharpened it. Whatever interest attaches to your subject-matter must be evoked here and now; whatever powers you are strengthening in the pupil, must be exercised here and now; whatever possibilities of mental life your teaching should impart, must be exhibited here and now. (in Cahn, p. 265)

With this passionate description, Whitehead urged teachers to understand students' mental activity by linking learning to students' present lives.

> the understanding which we want is an understanding of an insistent present. The only use of a knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present. No more deadly harm can be done to young mind than by depreciation of the present. The present contains all that there is. (in Cahn, 1997, p. 263)

Whitehead refers vividly to this concept of, "perpetual [mental] activity" as, "the golden rule of education" (in Cahn, p. 265) –an all consuming and overriding need.

In Whitehead's estimation, the active human mind is an asset to be used for development. The most valuable development to man is self-development gained through intellectual development.

Today, I fear that Whitehead would be disappointed, if not perplexed, by governmental bodies' lack of interest in the present perceptions of students. Their reluctance to harness the experiential knowledge each individual student has and embrace the collective knowledge provided by the masses perhaps signifies a lack of prioritized interest. Perhaps they prefer to "excite interest by means of birch rod", "but without interest there will be no progress".

In my mind's eye, I can see Whitehead reflecting on the present state of education. I picture him musing over the influence and control of federal, state, and local bodies on students and teachers as they try to promote greater, although artificial interest. Though these bodies struggle to reinvent the wheel, a wheel that is at the very least already shaped by the individuality of each twenty-first century student, they unwillingly and inadvertently spring the natural frame of education into the "pedantry and routine" (in Cahn, p. 262).

Relevant Philosophy of Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire's (1987) Literacy: Reading the Word and the World offers the English/language arts curriculum a political link. Freire (1987) contends that education can not be fully considered without an awareness that education is a political act in and of itself "And since education models souls and re-creates hearts, it is the fulcrum of social change" (p. 41). Freire believed that education is ultimately offered by those whose thoughts have been harmonized and are in tune with a present or former regimn. The pedagogy of these educators stems from mental assimilation and accommodation of thoughts and concepts presented by the regimn. This form of education, he contends, gives rise to a form of cultural reproduction.

Freire's conception of this cultural reproduction begins with *reading*. He believed that "Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world" (p. 29). Substantuating this belief, he offers a heuristic of his own reading experiences describing the process as a progression from first *reading* the world to *reading* the written word. His depiction of his childhood begins with his house, its bedrooms and the attic and backyard. He learned to *read* each of these elements in his life just as he learned to read strong winds announcing a storm. Later, he recounts learning to read "things, objects and signs through using them in relationship…" (p. 30) with what he already knew.

Freire makes quite apparent that we as humans can not remove or discount the cultural shaping that we encounter living in the world. Freire believed that each and every event and encounter shapes our background and our future. Because humans

are shaped by their background, Freire warned of the authoritarian teacher whose method is to fill students' heads with facts. Freire contended that this form of instruction offers no liberation to students. The great misfortune of the authoritarian approach, he believed, is that students can not cultivate critical thinking abilities. Rather they remain passive, held captive by, rather than educated by, their oppressors. Instead, Freire supported an educational approach that balanced the process of exploration. He contended that the teacher and the students should interact sharing the power. One way to share the power and free the educational experience, he believed, is through discussion. Discussion promotes a connection with others in the environment. Through discussion, participants find freedom rather than oppression. "The students' voices should never be sacrificed, since it is the only means through which they make sense of their own experience in the world" (p. 152). Additionally, the process of learning through discussion is a free and developing process. In order to understand the free and developing process of learning through dialogue, one must understand that dialogue is a construct of words formed by a world.

> Reading the world always preceeds reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. This movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. (p. 35)

The dynamic movements of learning then stem from the words of the surrounding world--a world that is "read" and perceived by its inhabitants,

> it is through multiple discourses that students generate meaning of their everyday social contexts. Without understanding the meaning of their immediate social reality, it is most difficult to comprehend their relations with the wider society. (p. 154)

Viewing the culture as a factor in the learning process, Freire also believed that the environment, a by-product of the culture, is an important factor in the

learning process. As human beings, we are conscious of the world around us and others perceptions of us in that world. Often individuals are excluded, dominated or silenced while others are admired, congratulated, and respected. This interactive and ongoing relationship fills environments where humans interact. An oppressive environment then is not a place for optimal learning and investigative discussion.

Freire's interrelated educational theory is one that I can easily embrace. Learning begins as an individual activity that is directly linked to personal backgrounds and experiences. Mental connections to these backgrounds and experiences through dialogue enhance the learning experience. As simple as this may sound, my experience as a classroom teacher suggests that it is difficult to achieve this form of connection with students--perhaps because of the interactive struggles for power that occur on the battlefield of the classroom.

Relevant Philosophy of Louise M. Rosenblatt

Louise M. Rosenblatt (1938) would not disagree with Dewey's (1902), Whitehead's (1997) or Freire's (1987) notions that lessons should be representative of the lives of students.

> Any knowledge about humankind and society that schools can give him [the student] should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life. It is not only for some future way of life that he needs to be prepared. During his school years, he is already part of the larger world… (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 3)

Rosenblatt (1995) believed that schools must offer students meaningful information pertinent to their lives. Specifically concerned with literature, Rosenblatt contended that literature allows students to "foster general ideas or theories about human nature and conduct, define moral attitudes, and habitual responses to people

and situations (p. 4). The formation of these perspectives inevitably considers the personal and social experiences of humans.

Rosenblatt portrayed an English/language arts classroom environment as conscious of the social and cultural issues inherent to that environment and reflective of the social and cultural issues students bring with them to that classroom environment. An artifact of and participant with that larger world, Rosenblatt contended that literature lessons must provide students with a link to their world.

Rosenblatt (1938), delving deeper into the personal nature of the experience of reading than Freire, committed to paper an Interactive Reading Theory. This theory she later renamed the Transactional Learning Theory (1995). The essence of the theory named in Literature as Exploration was the embedded and inescapable interaction between the reader of the literature and the text. Rosenblatt saw the reader as an active participant in the literature—an internal and external character who makes a personal connection and constructs a personal meaning with and from the text. A novel, poem, or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. "The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual, emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24). This imaginatively constructed meaning and connection Rosenblatt saw as dependent on particular times and cultural contexts. After an aesthetic or emotional connection with the text was made, the reader could then explore efferent analysis of the literature. Efferent experiences

occur when "Our attention is primarily focused on selecting out and analytically abstracting the information or ideas or directions for action that will remain when the reading is over" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 32). During this efferent dimension of the experience, the reader focuses attention on the factual aspects of the words pushing the aesthetic dimension of the experience aside. Rosenblatt held to the notion that important to the reader are situations, thoughts, and emotions brought about by the reading. It is the personal experience that she held in high esteem.

Rosenblatt strove, with Literature as Exploration (1995), to provide groundwork "for setting up a process that would make personal response the basis for growth toward more and more balanced self-critical, knowledgeable interpretation" (p. 286). Rosenblatt emphasized her commitment to the personal response aspect of the reading experience contending that "a text, once it leaves its author's hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work –sometimes, even, a literary work of art" (p. ix).

Rosenblatt believed that humans seek with literature to understand all the possibilities of life and "participate in another's visions – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible" (p. 5).

> To produce a poem or play, the reader must broaden the scope of attention to include the personal, affective aura and associations surrounding the words evoked and must focus on –experience, live through—the moods, scenes, situations being created during the transaction" (Rosenblatt, 1995, xvii).

In traditional public schools today, literature is not customarily taught in an open forum that invites the affective aura. Mandates and reforms stifle the creativity and the exploration process. The type of reform needed to lead the literature

curriculum toward the type of transaction Rosenblatt referred to will not require more testing, software, or teacher training. It will, however, require an informed vision.

Relevant Philosophy of Richard Beach

Richard Beach's (1993) reader-response theory offered English/language arts a shared vision. A comprehensive approach to literary exploration, Beach's reader-response perspectives represent the work of grounding forefathers in the field of English/language arts. Beach's theory includes the textual, psychological, cultural, social, and experiential perspectives of a reader's responses. Beach argued that "Each of the perspectives serves to address certain questions"…and that "each perspective implies possible links between these questions" (Beach, p. 155).

Beach's textual, psychological, cultural, social, and experiential perspectives offer the English teacher a set of theories designed to elicit students' literary responses. The textual perspective is "particularly concerned about students' knowledge of text or genre conventions and the kinds of literary know-how they will need in responding to a text" (Beach, 1993, pp. 17 & 155). Through close attentive study, students dissect the text analyzing such elements as choice, sequence, position, tone, and mood. By studying the conventions of the text, they cultivate a more complete understanding of it (Beach, 1993).

Psychoanalytical and the transactional learning theories are part of Beach's psychological perspective. This perspective assumes "that readers' responses are shaped by their level of cognitive or intellectual development, cognitive abilities and processes, and subconscious forces" (Beach, 1993, p. 71). With this perspective,

forces that comprise all of what each reader brings to each reading can explain the readers' responses.

The social perspective assumes that individuals are motivated by "roles, status, motives [and] needs" (Beach, 1993, p. 105). These factors lead individuals to take on the social roles of authoritarian or subservient. These roles then dictate responses. Individual responses often change from one setting to another as the person's perceived status changes. This shift suggests that literary response is a social phenomenon. This perspective springs from the social constructivist theory that asserts that knowledge is not external to the knower. Because of this internal nature of the knowledge, it is not scientifically verifiable (Beach, 1993, pp. 103-105).

The cultural perspective is the socialization process that shapes new members. This culturalization process includes the

> sharing of common language and conceptual concepts defining norms and boundaries of appropriate interpersonal behavior, recruiting, selecting, socializing, and training members, [and] allocating authority, power, status, and resources (Schein from Beach, 1993, p. 125).

The experiential perspective is concerned with the personal experience of the reader as he encounters the text. Processes of the experiential response include "engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting [and] evaluating/reflecting" (Purves & Beach; Beach & Marshall from Beach, 1993, p. 52). During the engagement phase, readers enter an emotional realm identifying with situations. The constructing phase takes the reader into a fictitious world where he begins constructing his perceptions or characters, settings, and events. During imaging, the reader creates visual representations. The connecting phase involves the reader in a more personal

manner. Here he relates his own experiences to those found in the text. While evaluating and reflecting, the reader considers the text and its ability to provide for him a quality experience (Beach, 1993, p. 52).

Because learning is a process of discovery (Dewey, 1902, Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, Rousseau, 1969, Vygotsky, 1962, Whitehead in Cahn, 1997, and Wiggins, 1989) that should "start where the learner is" (Bruner, 1977, p. ix), it makes sense to learn where our twenty-first century students are with the English/language arts curriculum and explore their experiences with reader-response rather than focus only on the theories, philosophies and perspectives regarding reader-response. Students, however, are easily and treacherously overlooked. They cannot vote, they do not pay taxes, they have no unions or personally organized and run coalitions. Expanding the problem of student oppression, "Most adults underestimate young people's powers of observation and insight (Lincoln, 1995). It is important to remember, however, that they are those who experience dedicated time to the formal task of reading in the public school system. As recipients of and responders to reading and reading instruction, they are those perhaps most qualified to assess the experience of reading and reader-response.

Today English/language arts teachers find themselves barraged by mandates, reforms, and standards promoted by various entities. These mandates, reforms, and standards restrict teacher's freedom to make professional decisions. Prescripted manuals often shift the teacher's focus away from students and onto new demands that threaten their livelihoods. When school districts receive federal or state money to adopt one research-based program or another, the teacher's time is redistributed. No

longer do they have the same amount of time to analyze the needs and hear the voices of students. This redistribution of time robs students of their teacher's professional insight and deteriorates the quality of their educations. Dweck & Leggett's (1988) research portray the deterioration of performance. They found that those who saw a task as difficult either avoided the task altogether or performed the task at a deteriorated level. Teachers often feel that they can not avoid performing the requirements of mandates, reforms, and standards and maintain their jobs. These requirements then become an extrinsic motivator that "motivates [an] inferior, type of learning" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 124). The combination of deteriorated performances and inferior learning undermines the credibility of the profession and the successfulness of students. In this politically charged and changing atmosphere, each day student's voices are becoming expendable items—and what an important set of voices to expend.

Research Design

This qualitative inquiry, based on the Moustakas (1990) heuristic design, embraces the idea that no such thing as "sheer self-activity" exists in public schools or in the classroom but rather, it is collaboration that creates the setting. This research design promises to shed light on the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives?* It seeks not to make antagonists of any previous perspective or theory, but rather to explicate a more amalgamated understanding of reader-response from the learners', teachers' and the philosophers' collective perspectives. It seeks to calm warring federal and state legislatures, task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental

organizations by turning attention onto what really matters – the reading experience of students.

The problem we now face is the disempowerment of our students. Through omission, our students, who we as English/language arts instructors hope will understand, interact with, and reflect upon reading and literature, have not been heard through heuristic examination. Educators continue to strive for excellency for students in the discipline of English/language arts. Sometimes disregarding political, divisive, and ostracizing obstacles, they seek success—but for whom—their students, themselves—or is it for the bureaucracy? Culturized by a politically driven entity, I don't think they know. I do know, however, that the English/language arts discipline is missing the point. Concentrating on superfluous issues, English/language arts teachers are not pausing long enough to listen to their students or even themselves.

With this inquiry, I invite the students' and the teachers' voices to be heard. I seek to understand the phenomenon of reader-response from a holistic perspective. Because of the nature of heuristic research involving initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, it will be necessary that I tell my own teacher story along with those stories of my students. Through this indwelling or "turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience [I will gaze] with unwavering attention and concentration" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24) on the question that evades me: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives.*

Because the experience of reader-response is a poorly understood area for me, I seek to understand it on a deeper level. By doing so, I hope to improve my teaching skills. This research may also prompt other educators to reflection, prevent professional apathy, and promote professional action.

> Qualitative research explains the poorly understood territories of human interaction. Like explorers who seek to identify and understand the biological and geological processes that create the patterns of physical landscape, qualitative adventurers seek to describe and understand the processes that create the patterns of the human terrain. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 173)

In order to quiet the reflective wonderings that began my rookie year, I will attend to the reader-response experience with focused urgency. With this inquiry, I will attempt to understand "the patterns of the human terrain" regarding the reader-response experience. Because heuristic research is an individual experience that seeks personal enlightenment, "judgment [of the study will be] made by the primary researcher, who is the only person who has undergone the heuristic inquiry…" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32)

> The difficulty of teaching does not stem from its complexity, but rather from the fact that it demands total surrender and total vigilance. It is not an intellectual activity so much as a moral and perceptual one. That is why some of the best teachers are not necessarily the best thinkers. Their genius resides in their capacity to invest so much significant attention to their subjects that the outer world just disappears. They possess a capacity to give their lessons such intellectual urgency that the conventional life loses all its appeal, and students enter the bliss of pure philosophical absorption (Inchousti, 1993, p. 168).

Inchousti's few sentences left me with a smile and the conviction that absorption in the reader-response experience through the heuristic methodology could benefit not only myself but perhaps the field of English/language arts as well.

Initial Engagement: Stage One

From 1992-2005 I have been an educator. During my entire career I have collected data from the two school districts where I have taught. Admittedly, I began collecting teacher memorabilia for personal reasons. Either I wanted to remember my students through their gifts to me, or I wanted to memorialize my own life experiences. Whatever the reason for their existence, it is through this collected teacher memorabilia, student work and essays, my own readings and journal entries, lesson plans, and student interviews that I plan to discover the elements of a reader's-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives. This research will not be standard to all educators and should not be generalized to others and their specific situations, yet based on my own reflections and those of my students; other practitioners may be able to extricate from the research their own personal understandings of the phenomenon of reader-response. I too hope this research frees the educational imagination within us all.

> It may well be the imaginative capacity that allows us also to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours. Imagination may be a new way of decentralizing ourselves, of breaking out of the confinement of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, 'Here we are'. (Greene, 1995, p. 31)

May this research let us come "face to face" with our students, ourselves, and the perspectives "apparently at odds with ours". May every unique classroom subculture embrace the goodness of which it is and find the instructional method or methods that allow it to "call out, 'Here we are'."

Immersion: Stage Two

Having realized that I will never, no matter the number of books and journals I read, workshops I attend, college courses I enroll in, certifications that I gain, or degrees that I attain, more fully understand the experience of reader-response until I deeply and internally consult myself and my students, I decided to embark upon a heuristic journey.

I set sail in the fall of 2003. I immersed myself in a conscious and reflective process. I began committing to journal, personal thoughts and insights regarding the phenomenon of reader-response. When I read something and a thought struck me, I would quickly jot it down. In the 2004-2005 school year, after receiving Institutional Review Board approval to involve students in this heuristic experience, I began jotting down observations about students' reading experiences. I watched their actions and heard their dialogue. I noted their questions. This journal will guide my understandings and interpretations when the time is right. Today my journal is filled with self-dialogue, reflections, connections, and insights regarding the experience of reader-response, though the puzzle is not yet complete. I have not yet interactively considered the learners' perspective. Their experiences now remain "out of conscious reach primarily because [I have] not yet paused long enough to examine his or her experience of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25).

As a way of understanding the experience from the learner's perspective, I plan to analyze teacher memorabilia, students' daily work and their explanatory essays, my own readings and journal entries, lesson plans, and student interviews. Analysis of each element will allow what is now focal knowledge "(unseen and

invisible)" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 21) to merge with subsidiary elements (immediate and visible) (Moustakas, 1990, p. 21) forming a tacit understanding "making possible a sense of wholeness or essence of [the] phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 21). Through this "wholeness" the experience of reader-response may be better understood.

Incubation: Stage Three

The incubation phase (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 28-29) provides researchers illuminated perspectives on the topic of their choice. During this phase I will remove myself from the conscious evaluation of the research. Instead, I will subconsciously digest the entirety of all the sources of information at my disposal. By merging each teacher theme and sub-theme with those themes and sub-themes attained from student-produced information, I will be able to explicate salient concepts regarding the experience of reader-response.

Illumination: Stage Four

This stage of illumination will follow a soul-searching stage of incubation. Illumination occurs "when the researcher is in a receptive state of mind without conscious striving or concentration…" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29) At this time, the researcher gains an intuitive impression of the topic studied. It is a conscious awareness of the experience of reader-response that I seek.

Explication: Stage Five

By analyzing collected teacher memorabilia, student work and essays, my own readings and journal entries, lesson plans, and student interviews, I will be able to validate an overarching theme encapsulated in the phenomenon of reader-response.

I hope that this overarching theme will have practical applications in the classroom. While the findings of this research will not be standard to all educators, I hope that practitioners may be able to piece together the personal puzzle of reader-response and free the educational imagination.

Creative Synthesis: Stage Six

Through intense reflection, I will weave together new understandings of reader-response. By fusing my own conceptions with students' conceptions and analyzing conceptions attained through multiple literary sources, I will explicate a more holistic understanding of the experience of reader-response—an understanding that includes students' voices and embraces separateness of theories and methodologies for the reality to which they belong.

Summary

This chapter suggested the complexities of the English/language arts curriculum and outlined the bureaucratic and political control that permeates the discipline in the public school setting. It provided an account of the social and cultural context that oppresses the voices of students and teachers. It also demonstrated the necessity of students' and teachers' perspectives. It offered a description of the theories and philosophies relevant to the reader-response experience and described a personal literary experience that reaffirmed my interest in a heuristic reader-response study. Finally, this chapter described the Clark Moustakas (1990) heuristic design methodology that will shape this inquiry.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter addresses the need for an exploration of the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives.* It will explain what led me to the heuristic methodology and discuss the specific elements of the Clark Moustakas method. I will describe the participants of this inquiry and present the procedures utilized for collecting and evaluating data. Ultimately, I will explain how this data will be united and delivered.

Need for the Study

The English/language arts discipline, although embedded in a turbulent and tumultuous public school system susceptible to the will and agendas of those in power, remains an important influencing discipline. People of all ages use elements of the English/language arts triad daily. Literature, language, and composition are staples of life. If the reciprocal influence of literature does stimulate mental cognitions (Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin, 1990), then the manner in which people apprehend literature through reader-response is important.

The majority of school age children in the United States attend public schools. In this school system students spend devoted time to the discipline of English/language arts and the task of reading. There English/language arts teachers attempt to guide students toward apprehension through literature. How can it best be accomplished? Federal and state legislatures think they know. Their mandates and reforms offer the newest prescribed approach. Task forces, universities, researchers, school administrators, and parental organizations, much like the arm-chair quarter-back, think they know. They supply demands, requests, and suggestions regarding

just how English/language arts should be taught. The English language arts discipline undoubtedly needs reform, but not the autocratic form that oppresses from above or the obstinate form that cries up from below. Much like a mechanic that tries to repair an engine without analyzing the cog and the location of its slippage, the bureaucratic and communal forces that drive public education today are striving to repair the English/language arts discipline without consulting its engine—the students and the teachers. My concerns are not based on elitist feelings of superiority, but rather on the belief that mandates and reforms, constructed without hearing all voices, reduce opportunities for learning. Not hearing students' and teachers' thoughts as mandates and reforms are constructed can severely limit the teaching methods that are utilized in the classroom. As mandates and reforms are autocratically dictated and cries from below gain purchase, teachers' attention naturally shifts to the new demands of the day. What must be accomplished, and how must it be accomplished? This reallocation robs students of not only their teachers' attention, but also their teachers' professional judgment and action.

Educational improvements that are structured from only the voices of bureaucratic powerhouses and communal cries for assistance will make our public schools less effective than they are today. By ignoring the voices of students and how they best apprehend the English/language arts, mandates and reforms will not reflect the individual, culturally morphed set of twenty-first century students that populate our public schools today. Rather, the mandates and reforms that capture and dictate teachers' performances in the classroom will promote the use of a more irrelevant pedagogy and curriculum offered twenty-first century students. By ignoring the

voices of students, federal and state legislators as well as local authorities and communal forces are sending the unspoken message that students are unimportant—a message their words and campaigns belie.

When mandates and reforms for educational improvement are based only on the prescriptives of those in power or those communal voices that cry the loudest, an additional message is conveyed, "Dear students, Your human experience and the knowledge gained from it are expendable". In an educational environment that strives for greater and greater student achievement through mandated reforms, the situational irony is evident. How can this bureaucracy expend the voices of those they strive to assist? Would students' input regarding the apprehension of knowledge in English/language arts be another important voice to consider as mandates and reforms are deliberated? The failure to hear students' voices undermines the credibility of federal and states legislators and local factions and organizations who claim students are important. This deficiency sends the reverse message to twenty-first century students. After all, they may have heard or intuitively realize that "Actions speak louder than words." Tragically, failure to hear students' voices regarding their experience with the English/language arts curriculum could be cheating the discipline of knowledge and strategies that could help students apprehend English/language arts and all that it has to offer.

My experience with students suggests that they are insightful. They have yet to exclusively attend to internal and external thoughts signifying the absence of complete cultural homogenization. They know or care very little about political correctness outside of the social context of the school and their immediate social

realm. The naivety of their fresh perspective could be a great asset to the English/language arts discipline if their voices were heard and attended to with serious consideration.

If an education in English/language arts is to represent more to our twenty-first century students than simply an accolade, then their English/language arts experiences must be valuable and worthwhile to *them*. If there can be agreement on how English/language arts should be taught, and how students apprehend in the English/language arts classroom, students' voices must be included.

My greatest fear regarding mandates and reforms passed down to the English/language arts classroom without the benefit of students' perspectives is that the English/language arts curriculum will offer students nothing more than an empty experience, albeit filled with knowledge. I envision students leaving the public school system, having passed through many English/language arts classrooms where scripted pedagogies followed the autocratic mandates and reforms of the day. Diploma in hand signifying their knowledge of the disciplines, English/language arts included, their vision of the world narrow. When they encounter a real-life situation or issue, they refer to their receptacle of rote knowledge. Finding no rote information on the topic there, they do not know how to respond. In fact, without rote knowledge as a base, they are afraid to respond. The English/language arts discipline, when not scripted or prescribed, allows students to encounter life. On the pages they visualize real-life situations and issues. From their visualization, they construct meanings, work through conflicts and draw upon their background to perceive experience for a future date.

Mandates and reforms, even if not literally scripted, imply a prescribed pedagogy. The voice of authority declares, "Students' standardized test scores will rise. If they do not, there shall be no atonement." What a bleak picture—and a true tragedy of English/language arts education in the public school system.

Before deciding how to teach English/language arts and how students apprehend knowledge through literature, the reader-response experience must be analyzed. Tacit knowledge must be gained through this analysis. What do we as teachers know about our students and ourselves as readers? What do we know about our students and ourselves as responders to reading? Are there considerations that English/language arts teachers should be aware of? What information apprehended through literature stays with students and may be accessed at a later date?

Today attempts are made to determine curriculum goals for the English/language arts discipline by people outside of the educational system or removed from the unique ethnographic classroom. This study seeks to tacitly understand the experience of reader-response from the students' and teachers' perspectives. The heuristic inquiry approach will be utilized because of its perspective seeking rather than truth seeking nature. By questioning participants of the public educational system, untapped additional ways of knowing may lead to previously unknown insights both personally and professionally. Additionally, questioning those involved in public education may inform future mandates and reforms.

Heuristic Research Methodology

Based on Clark Moustakas's (1990) model of heuristic research outlined in Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications, this design requires the researcher to be an active participant in the research. As the researcher delves deeper into the study, he or she devises new methods for deeper understanding. Greater understanding befalls the researcher throughout the process as he or she experiences a more complete measure of self-awareness and self-knowledge. This "process of discovery leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to their own experiences and lives." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9)

Because of the researcher's extremely active presence in this inquiry process, heuristic research makes complete objectivity impossible. The ongoing involvement of the researcher influences the focus of the study which, in turn, influences the research.

The heuristic methodology can be linked to Heidegger's (1962) existential phenomenology. This approach stresses the idea that people are shaped by the cultural practices in which they live, "the 'world' has already been 'presupposed' and indeed in various ways" (p. 63). This cultural background, Heidegger believed, could not be separated from the subject. Because of this natural and inseparable bond, the heuristic methodology is a *subjective* one. It questions the nature of existence and seeks a way of knowing. The foundations of the heuristic methodology lies in Michael Polanyi's (1969) text Knowing and Being. There Polanyi set forth the notion

that "scientific discovery cannot be achieved by explicit inference, nor can its true claims be explicitly stated" (p. 138).

Relying on this framework, the heuristic methodology turns to tacit knowledge, an analysis method that produces a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the topic of the study. Two types of knowledge contribute to tactic knowledge. Subsidiary factors are those that gain initial attention while focal factors are the unseen areas of an experience. Together these two factors contribute to a united and intuitive sense of an experience known as tacit knowledge. Polanyi's (1969) assertion that "We can know more than we can tell…" (p. 4) links to Heidegger's (1962) existential phenomenological concept that people are shaped by the culture that surrounds them, but heuristic research extends the concept by assuming that we may find the answers to our problems by actively searching the things that surround us. Polanyi (1969) also asserted that "all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge" (p. 144). Even "explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied" (p. 144).

The heuristic research methodology is a perception seeking mission based on the idea that all knowledge cannot be articulated and "tacit knowledge…is indeterminate, in the sense that its content cannot be explicitly stated" (Polanyi, 1969, p. 141). This methodology offers the seeker a perspective and "the transition from perception to discovery is unbroken. The logic of perceptual integration may serve therefore as a model for the logic of discovery" (Polanyi, 1969, p. 139).

Heuristic research does not limit the possibility of knowledge. It does not "restrict the potential for new awareness and understanding" (Moustakas, 1990, p.

22). Rather it strives to complete the statistics and enhance validity through "examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal documents" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). All of this information is searched for themes. I have selected the heuristic methodology because it offers many options for collecting and evaluating information in an ever-changing and emerging intellectual realm and because it offers me the opportunity to understand the internal workings of the reader-response experience from various perspectives for a more holistic understanding.

> Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

I am not sure that I could obtain a deep and personal understanding of the dynamics and constituents of the reader-response experience through any other methodology. Because the Moustakas (1990) design affords me the opportunity to search, sifting through and continually reflecting and making connections, subsidiary and focal factors have the opportunity to become tacit knowledge. "The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Because the heuristic methodology requires the engagement of the researcher, I will develop a deeper personal understanding of the reader-response experience.

The Moustakas (1990) heuristic research design requires a six stage process. These stages include: *initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination*,

explication, and *creative synthesis*. During the *initial engagement* stage, the researcher discovers "an intense interest, [or] a passionate concern" (p. 27). Following this discovery, the researcher "awaits the disciplined commitment that will reveal its underlying meanings" (p. 27). Once this disciplined commitment has arrived, the researcher enters the *immersion* stage. There the researcher "lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states. Everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question" (p. 28). Following this sustained focus phase, the *incubation* period emerges. During this *incubation* process, "the researcher retreats from the intense concentrated focus of the question" (p. 28). Knowledge is expanding yet the "researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way" (p. 28). This "period…enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities" (p. 28). The *illumination* stage follows the incubation stage. *Illumination* arrives "when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition" (p. 29). This *illumination* may be considered a penetration into the conscious mind. Explication trails illumination. The purpose of this phase is "to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (p. 31). The researcher utilizes internal frames of reference knowing that "meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience" (p. 31). The final phase of the heuristic design is *creative synthesis*. "Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a *creative synthesis* (pp. 31-32) or whole knowledge. "The creative synthesis can only be achieved through tacit and intuitive powers" (p. 31).

The *subjective* nature of heuristic research has lead some to question its validity.

> The question of validity [however] is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-seeking and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (p. 32)

My personal experiences suggest that this is a valid approach. For example, while visiting friends on the campus of a school where I once taught (Orbit, pseudonym), I meandered off alone. I traversed the halls of the Orbit Junior High School where the young and vibrant students of my past once walked. Misty eyed, I opened the stately Oak door of my former eighth grade classroom. Finding it empty that hour, I lingered. The wooden pine floor of this upstairs classroom creaked as I passed over the boards. The lawnmower outside vibrated the old glass window panes held loosely between wooden frames. A fleck of white paint fell away and landed on the plaster window sill. I gazed down upon pencil shavings and wadded candy wrappers. With memories rushing back to me, I sat down in an old steel framed student desk nearby. In that chair a flood of recollections tumbled over my consciousness. This was the room where Jeremy had said, "Hey good-lookin'" on that first day of school and left me, a rookie teacher, to deal with his remark. I had begun that rookie year so prescriptively and stoically. Cody had remarked during that first week of school, "If you don't like kids, then why did you become a teacher"? The dialogue of those moments was emblazoned across my mind. The class clown Curtis, who often brought levity to our lives when I would not was deceased, a victim of the war on terrorism in Iraq. I became entranced in the past, reliving remembered

times brought to consciousness through stored episodic memories. During this trance like state, I developed perceptions of instances that would have remained lost. For example, during this moment, I remembered and then examined Jeremy's remark of, "Hey good-lookin." From this vantage point, I was able to perceive Jeremy's personality traits and his need to gain favor through compliment. I was also able to perceive of my own need to find respect as a teacher. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory sprang to my mind, and I was at once able to tacitly understand that although operating on separate life planes, we both desired the relatedness element of the self-determination theory. Jeremy needed to feel related to the new teacher to bolster his cultural position and self-esteem. I desired respect, an area related to Deci and Ryan's competence factor, yet viewing my desire for respect as only related to the competence factor offers only a superfluous analysis. I knew on this day that my need for competence developed from an overriding need to feel related to the teaching staff. After all, I was now a teacher and felt the need to appear competent to the culturally trained set of teacher eyes that observed me. This knowledge that came to me tacitly is only a brief vignette, yet it illustrates the type of sustained focus that the Moustakas heuristic design demands. By becoming suspended in an open mental state for extended periods of time, the researcher may utilize his own memory and all of those items that surround him to perceive of a personally meaningful knowledge. My goals for this study, however, do not begin and end with my own personal meanings. I hope that this study will be far reaching sparking both social and educational dialogue and reform.

Population

Utilizing the broad and open heuristic design, the population for this inquiry is any individual from my past or involved in my present experiences that can tell me more about the reader-response experience. The heuristic research methodology provides me the latitude of learning about the reader-response experience from individuals of by-gone eras. While I obviously didn't live during the times of John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead, et. al., I can draw on all media types from the beginning of recorded history to the present to shape my ways of knowing because "*Personal Knowledge* [is] capable of accommodating any conceivable new piece of evidence" (Polanyi, 1969, p. 31).

My research will begin with my students. Together we will explore the experience of reader-response. The students in this population will be primarily, but not limited to, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students ranging in age from twelve to seventeen years.

This inquiry also includes teachers, administrators, teacher's aides, counselors, and other members of my culture with whom I come into contact. This does not exclude those individuals with whom I contact through media print or those with whom I may come into contact by happenstance events.

Those individuals with whom I come into contact on a daily basis are those within the school culture where I work. I am employed by Middletown Junior High School (pseudonym). Middletown is a K-12 district producing an average daily membership (ADM) of 2551.35 (Middletown City Schools, 2000-2001). It is the only junior high school the city has to offer. It is the largest of the junior high schools

within a twenty mile radius of the city. It is the fifth ladder in a six ladder school system. Students of Middletown Junior High school populate a small south centrally located city of 15,691 (Middletown [pseudonym] Area Chamber of Commerce, 2003).

Procedure

What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives? This question resulted from the *initial engagement* phase of the Moustakas (1990) heuristic research design. It was my first year as a rookie teacher in 1992 that planted the seeds of questioning regarding the experience of reader-response. My students' lack of interest in grammar and their interest in trade books initialized my reflective quest to understand the experience of reader-response. My need to explore this question has only grown since its initialization and is substantiated by a decade and a half of personal experience, teacher preparation, and wonder. The term *experience* included in my research question is meant to encourage a perspective seeking result while discouraging any form of quantitative measurement or correlative results, for I have no interest in such measurements at this time. It is the holistic perspective that is alluring to me.

The second phase of the inquiry is *immersion*. In order to *immerse* myself in the phenomenon of the reader-response experience from the learners' and teachers' perspectives, I first began a journal. I recorded notes about classroom occurrences, conversations, news reports, newspaper articles, personal thoughts or connections, and any other information that sparked an interest or a question was recorded. These recordings were simply stated in raw form. I did not revise any information.

Occasionally I would re-read information that I had recorded. During these times, I might notice a misspelling or a mechanical error, but I never made any effort to revise the original work. These re-readings were for the purpose of personal reflection and connection and nothing more. Sometimes I would glean bits of information that I had initially overlooked as I had recorded data. Other times I would make connections to other areas or catch insights into themes. These reviews would often lead me to additional questions taking me down related paths and to additional data.

In this study I refer to myself as the primary researcher, naming student participants in the study as co-researchers. All others who provided unsolicited information for the study I refer to as consultants. When the generalized identifier "co-researcher" or "consultant" would leave the participant's life-experience perspective unclear, co-researchers are named as students and consultants named as teachers. Through the information that I obtain from co-researchers and consultants, I strive to view the phenomenon of reader-response from their perspectives. I view their experience with reader-response as equal to my own—hence the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives.*

To bring student co-researchers onto the research stage alongside myself, I asked students to respond to questions regarding the reader-response experience. I provided students with these questions in the form of writing prompts known as Pre-class Activities (PCAs). PCAs are school required and therefore one of students' daily tasks. From the school perspective, these required prompts are meant to focus students' attention and reduce discipline problems. From the teacher's perspective, these prompts are meant to allow students to become familiar with the writing process

and their own written word as they explore personal thoughts. Additionally, PCA's offer students opportunities for publication. I designed three of these prompts to query students about the reader-response experience. Over the course of the data collection period, school-required prompts unintentionally elicited additional information regarding the reader-response experience. Often prompts served as student initiated starting points for whole class and individual discussions. These informal discussions were allowed to proceed in a non-restrictive fashion. The bits of information that I gleaned from these unsolicited and informal explorations I recorded in my journal. These bits of information, along with students' writings, lead my research. Traveling down an emergent path of inquiry, students' writings served as starting points for individual interviews. These interviews were informal and allowed to proceed in a non-restrictive fashion. Additionally, I asked students to read a literature piece from the school anthology and explain in written form what thoughts went through their minds as they read. At the end of the story, I asked students to answer a text prepared critical thinking question related to the story. Students answered in written form. Next, I asked students to explain, also in written form, how they arrived at their answer to the text prepared query. None of the results from these inquiries were meant to provide quantitative results, for I had no interest in such an endeavor. Because of the perspective seeking nature of my search, co-researchers were allowed to address anything that they thought would be helpful in understanding the experience of reader-response. I later interviewed students utilizing the five written responses as discussion starters. These interviews were informal inquisitions and meant to allow students to express themselves in oral form. Conversation was

allowed to progress as co-researchers directed. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Students' class comments resulting from literature read during class were noted in my journal. These discussions arose from student selected trade books read to the class as well as teacher and student selected prose from the school adopted anthology. These notes were meant to provide insights into what appeals to readers and what sparks a reader's-response. These discussions were studied for reflection purposes. Again, these notes were in no way meant to offer quantitative data or used for correlative measurements.

To bring teachers' perspectives into the spotlight, I conversed with teachers informally snatching insight during chance encounters. The information I gained through unsolicited, happenstance conversations I recorded in my journal. Informal collaborative teacher discussions were a benefit of lunch in the teachers' lounge. These discussions I recorded in my journal. Again, this information was for reflection purposes and in no way meant to offer quantitative data for correlative purposes.

Incubation proved to be a naturally occurring yet difficult step in the heuristic model. During this stage, the primary researcher is to withdraw from the data in order to provide the inquirer enough time to subconsciously filter through the gathered information. This filtering process is the venue used to locate significant information. This task must be accomplished without imposing meaning. Because the heuristic process demands that no meaning be imposed, I refrained from predicting the relevancies of collected information. Heuristic data collection,

however, is an endless task. In a perspective-seeking mode, the primary researcher does record new information while previously collected information is incubating and awaiting *illumination*.

When *illumination* arrives, the primary researcher achieves insight into the theme(s) represented by the data. By being "open and receptive to tacit knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29), an unfolding of theme(s) occurs that leads to *explication*.

During the *explication* stage of the inquiry I examined, in a holistic manner, the themes that had surfaced and a new awareness emerged. Reader-response was now everywhere. Road signs and songs held meaning, and I recorded a great deal of information in my journal. I re-read data in order to more fully understand all of the information at my disposal. Now the heuristic research concept that asserts that we may find the answers to our problems by actively searching the things that surround us was much more than a theory. It was real. I began to gain a perspective on the experience of reader-response.

The *creative synthesis* stage is the final step in the heuristic research model. *Creative synthesis* is achieved when the primary researcher, completely familiar with data, themes, and the dynamics of the study, is able to utilize subsidiary and focal factors to create a tacit knowledge through an intuitive link. From this way of knowing, the primary researcher then is able to organize the components of the search in an expressable form. As is common of heuristic presentations, I will offer the results of this inquiry in a narrative style with the intention of a conversational tone. Because this inquiry has been a personal perspective-seeking mission, I felt that the narrative conversational format would best represent both the informal heuristic data

gathering process utilized in this study as well as the personal nature of the inquiry and my own personality. Through this informal narrative depiction, I present the personal, theatrical, and energetic drama that is the reader-response experience.

Summary

A summary of the need for a *perspective* seeking study addressing the question: What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives began this chapter. I outlined the initialization of these wonderings and described my sustained interest in this question. I presented the links and foundation of the Moustakas (1990) heuristic research design and discussed the inquiry population, as well as the procedures utilized for collecting and evaluating data. Finally, I disclosed the choices and reasoning behind decisions made for the final presentation of this information.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter discloses research addressing the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives.* It will reveal important topics from the learners' and teachers' perspectives. It will describe the reader-response process from the students', teachers' and researcher's perspectives. Ultimately, I will offer explicated conclusions.

Research Process

This research examines the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the learners' and teachers' perspectives?* My desire to understand the role of reader-response in the English/language arts classroom initialized this inquiry. I realized that I did not have an understanding of my own reader-responses, nor did I understand why my class at Orbit Junior High School (pseudonym) would critically evaluate trade books while my same grade level class at Middletown Junior High School (pseudonym) would not critically evaluate literature from their anthology. I continued my investigation into the English/language arts discipline, seeking anything that would shed light on the practice and improve my classroom teaching performance. Federal and state mandates and reforms coupled with those of local organizations and factions provided fodder for my thought, yet nothing read, discussed, mandated, reformed, or aligned was able to suggest how reader-response connections could be called forth on demand.

My hope for this inquiry is that I may extricate a better understanding of the reader-response phenomenon, both personally and in the English/language arts classroom. Additionally, I hope that the insight resulting from this study may add the

learners' and teachers' perspectives to the on-going nationwide English/language arts teaching methodology debates enabling greater learner and teacher effectiveness.

The perspective-seeking nature of this inquiry, along with the open-ended data sought, demanded a qualitative research design and prohibited any quantitative form of measurement. I was attracted to the Clark Moustakas (1990) heuristic methodology because its focus on the primary researcher as an element of the research process promised to shed personal light on the reader-response experience. Additionally, the internal search that it required, coupled with the demand for learner perspectives, promised a more holistic understanding of the reader-response experience while providing implications for the English/language arts discipline. Dwelling upon the entities of the process promised an explicated understanding of the reader-response experience. Michael Polanyi's (1969) assertion that "We know a comprehensive entity by interiorizing its parts or by making ourselves dwell in them…" (p. 214) underpins the Moustakas (1990) heuristic research design and addressed my need to "interiorize" the elements of the reader-response experience.

To supply data for the immersion stage, as well as provide opportunities for journaling, I asked students to compose written responses to directed Pre-class Activity (PCA) writing prompts. I queried students for their written opinions regarding great reading experiences both in and out of the classroom. As a basis for deeper understanding and as springboards for interview discussion where a deeper way of knowing might emerge, I queried students primarily focusing on three strands: what makes a book or story appealing, what makes you want to continue a book or story, what makes you want to go deeper into ideas or topics presented in a book or

story. In an effort to understand the experience of a reader's response during a reading, I asked students to note any thoughts, mental connections or wanderings they noticed during the reading of the story "Flowers for Algernon" by Daniel Keyes that students explored in the school adopted anthology (in Prentice Hall Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes, 2002). Students noted these thoughts on paper explaining their conscious processing. At the end of the story, I asked students to respond in written form to a critical thinking text-offered question related to "Flowers for Algernon". Next, I asked students to explain in writing how they arrived at their response to the text question they had just answered. I then interviewed students individually revisiting the prompts and questions for which they had provided written responses. These writings were utilized as springboards for discussion. In an effort to put students at ease and elicit deeper information, I conducted informal interviews allowing the discussions to progress naturally. During the interview process, deeper personal thoughts, connections, and wanderings did occur. These oral responses were tape recorded and transcribed for reflection purposes. Additionally, I made journal entries when students' words and thoughts promoted a personal connection or presented a question.

While I did not intentionally solicit information from teachers, those interested in my research often questioned me about the progress of my studies as well as my pursuit of a doctorate of philosophy. As I told them about my research, they offered valuable information regarding the reader-response experience from the teacher perspective. Discussion among colleagues often sprang from initial dialogue. At various times teacher consultants offered their own opinions regarding what makes

a book or story appealing, what makes them want to continue a book or story, and what makes them want to go deeper into ideas or topics presented in a book or story. I recorded their dialogue in my journal.

Teachers commonly conversing during breaks allowed me to capture their reader-responses and thoughts as well as professional reflections regarding reader-response experiences. Although I did not intentionally solicit this information, colleagues interested in the progress of my research often questioned me about my insights. From their queries, teacher discussions often sprang to life. During one of these discussions and realizing my desire to better understand the reader-response experience, teachers offered unsolicited opinions regarding great personal reading experiences. They volunteered information about classes that had seemed to be extremely connected to the material read. In everyday conversation and language they described these situations and explained what they believed caused the extreme reading connection.

As a participant in the study, I read literature noting my own thoughts, mental connections and wanderings during readings. Soon, my journal filled with thoughts, connections, and wanderings during readings of all types. I derived meaning from everything. Library books, notes, and songs all elicited a form of thought, connection or wandering for me. I even became a "watcher" of sorts, watching others' reactions to items read. For me, the meaning of "items read" bloomed into all forms of the word "read" including observations of others' receptions to their perceptions. This observation led me to realize the significance of body language in the reading experience. As I listened to my data and myself, the reader-response experience took

shape. The internal longings and struggles to understand the reader-response phenomenon became subsidiary knowledge as I began to understand the importance of the interest factor in the reader-response experience. The following excerpts are from my journal entries, students' writings, discussions, and interviews. They offer a personal knowledge regarding the reader-response experience. These excerpts contain the spelling and grammar errors and oral dialogue that make these representations distinct to the individual and offer a glimpse into the person's world at that time. Names have been changed to respect others' privacy.

Additional information for this research came from other individuals within my contact who could "read". I made no effort to determine any individuals' intuitive or literal reading levels, for I only sought an understanding of their thoughts, connections, and wanderings during a reading. I recorded these reflections in my journal.

To present all of the tales offered me by the co-researchers and consultants involved in the study, I selected the heuristic methodology. This approach promised to preserve the holistic nature of the reader-response experience. In keeping with the holistic nature of this methodology, I report my findings and analysis in unison.

Concrete Manifestation of the Reader-response Experience

Sometimes a verse, paragraph or story read elicits a shudder that courses over a reader, chill bumps spring forth, body hair standing on end. During this assemblage of energy, the reading experience becomes concrete. The sentinel of question steps aside allowing understanding to break across the chambers and over the fissures of

the mind. Like the life vest offered to a man overboard, the extension of understanding awakens the heart and soul. (Researcher's journal notation)

My research suggests that concrete elements are a facet of the reader-response experience. During the immersion stage of this research, individuals described moments when they had felt a great connection to a book or story. Their remembrances included descriptions of cold chills, clammy hands, thumping hearts, and elevated body temperature. During these moments of remembered connection, individuals' moods became more intense. They described the experience of transcending space and time, finding their minds and memories connected to past personal experiences. Individuals exhibited this connection by telling about specific remembrances that an item read evoked. Again, individuals would travel back in time as they told of the actual experience. These mental journeys transported travelers to happy, sad and frightening times. During these explorations, readers relived their primary experiences with books and stories in such a deep way as to elicit a secondary concrete response separate from the original concrete response that they described. They would often shudder, shrug, raise an eyebrow or shake their head from side to side as they remembered their experience with a particular read and a particular personal event.

Teachers described moments in the classroom when they had perceived a great number of students to be connected to the reading material. During these moments, they described a concrete response by many of their students even as their own moods became more intense. They detailed a noisier classroom with several of their students talking out of turn making statements and asking questions. When

extremely connected to the reading material in this way, they declared oral responses from students to be inevitable. They recalled students' changing facial expressions. Teachers reported remembrances of students rolling, fixing, and squinting their eyes. They spoke of students scrunching and twitching their noses and recalled students' exhibition of pursed mouths. They recalled students gesturing and standing during a connected reader-response experience. The cacophony they described told of an intense environment filled with energy. The student connection, they claimed, elicited interest from those students who did not seem to have an *initial* connection with the material read. Additionally, those students who they perceived to have an *initial* connection with the material read seemed to become more deeply engaged, exhibited by their actions, as the student produced energy level in the environment grew. Teachers recounted instances in which the bell signaling the end of the class inquiry did not stop the questioning, debating, and discussing as students filed out the door. Teachers described an environment in which a collective reader-response connection took on an electrical concrete embodiment that willed the investigation and discussion to continue out the door and down the hall.

During discussions with educators, teachers referred to these extreme reader-response experiences in the classroom with reverence. A far away look in their eyes and pauses in dialogue for reflection revealed a link of the present with the past. It was as though all of the teachers present understood the essence of the others' stories, for they were quick to join the dialogue telling of their own extreme reader-response experiences with their classes. Their commentary offered their perception of the experience. Just as they spoke of the remembered rising energy level in the

classroom and a perception of growing student engagement, I, too, witnessed this very phenomenon with the teachers as they conversed with one another. Though teachers described the concrete characteristics of extreme reader-response experiences in their classrooms, none of them could explain how this extreme connectedness could be achieved or maintained. They did contend that these moments seemed to arise when a majority of students, or a few students possessing cultural capital, seemed to have an interest in the subject matter. They were baffled though by what could interest a majority of students. They also were perplexed when they initiated discussion over the same reading material the following day with the same students and the same level of extreme reader-response did not begin *immediately* as it had the previous day. In these instances teachers reported that they were able to raise the energy element in the classroom by summarizing what students had said during the previous class period. Recounting students' indirect quotes that seemed to begin the discussion the previous class period, they said, offered the most effective method for reviving the dialogue, raising the energy level, and involving more students. Teachers reported that following their initiation of a discussion through summarization of students' previous words would sometimes bring about an extreme reader-response in the classroom while other times the dialogue would never reach the level that they would classify as an extreme reader-response classroom experience.

During this particular discussion with and observation of teachers, the wall clock advanced dangerously close to the bell summoning students into the building and teachers to their hall posts. Like the students they described, teachers'

discussions regarding extreme reader-responses continued with the ringing of the bell. Teachers deposited soda cans, frozen dinner trays, and napkins among other items into the trash and exited the teachers' lounge still engaged in their thoughts, discussions, and wanderings. From this event, I noted that teachers were interested in this subject matter and that while nothing had been literally "read" to elicit this extreme response, teachers were "reading". They were recalling experiences and "reading" information into and from past as well as present events. This form of mental reading was bringing forth thoughts, discussions, and wanderings. Teachers' commentary exhibited their perceptive "readings". These observations led me to conclude that "Reading is performed when any form of thought, discussion, or wandering is present. Reading is everything and interest is involved. Thoughts, discussions, and wanderings spring from interest." (Researcher's journal notation)

A review of data obtained from students revealed a concrete manifestation of the reader-response experience that teachers described and further supported the notion that reading is everything and interest is involved. During interviews, students described a great reading experience as one in which they withdraw from their present reality placing themselves in the literature. Kacy said that she "like[s] to curl up with an interesting book," while Devin stated that she likes to read "something that is interesting or you think is cool". Students depicted all other elements of reality as being retained in a dream-like state separate from their conscious awareness during this great or extreme reader-response experience. Students reported these periods of withdrawal to last for varying lengths of time. They discussed times in which a book or story reminded them of something that had happened in their lives. For a period of

time, they found themselves remembering that past event. Again, they portrayed the elements of reality surrounding them as being retained in a vacuum outside of their awareness. They were unable to reveal what made them realize that they had either stopped the literal act of reading or stopped reading with conscious awareness. Students stated, however, that they returned to the present and became aware of the elements of reality that surrounded them when they were verbally or physically interrupted.

The concrete quality of the reader-response experience was evidenced in my journal as well as school photographs. As students told of their dream-like experiences with reading, their postures changed. I noted this in my journal along with the observation that they re-told their reading experiences, often bringing up a personal life experience that they were reminded of by the reading. As these events unfolded, students' facial expressions changed. They often gestured with their hands and heads. During gesturing, the changing intensity of their speech was evident.

The concrete quality of the reader-response experience also unfolded in the classroom during the showing of a movie. After students read "The Diary of Anne Frank" (in Prentice Hall Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes), I showed the movie The Diary of Anne Frank (Stevens,1987). I recorded student characteristics in my journal as they reacted to the film, "intent, wide eyes. Some students leaning forward over their desks." As Mrs. Van Dan was dancing in the movie and saying, "I am a lady", Chloe raised her arms and began "snapping her fingers, softly smiling and giggling". When the teapot began steaming on the stove, Devin said, "Grab it", and she "motioned with her hand as if to clutch the handle of

the teapot herself." At one point during the movie, Bell wondered if Mrs. Van Dan had died asking, "Is she dead?" Morgan replied, "I don't think so. Look at her eyes".

Students' actions and reactions to the movie suggests that "reading" is not limited to the literal act of reading involving the eyes as it scans across print. The movie Diary of Anne Frank (Stevens, 1987) offered only visual and auditory links, yet students did exhibit thoughts and wanderings that evolved into discussion. An intuitive form of "reading" took place when Morgan replied to Bell's inquisition regarding Mrs. Van Dan's condition by answering that she didn't think she was dead and offered the perceptive statement, "Look at her eyes," as substantiation for her perception.

The concrete embodiment of a reader-response experience took the form of hand movements and smiling. This implies a personal connection and a past experience for both Chloe and Devin. Chloe's exhibition of snapping her fingers though Mrs. Van Dan did not do so herself suggests that Chloe's previous experience and knowledge of dance involved snapping fingers and that this act evoked an emotion exhibited by smiles and giggles.

Like Chloe, Devin's act of moving forward and grabbing with her hand as if to seize the teapot suggests a past personal knowledge of how one might react to a steaming teapot. Her elevated voice as she stated, "Grab it!" tells of an intense connection with the film through experience and feeling.

School photographs taken by students enrolled in Technology Education classes were displayed during a Student of the Month Assembly at Middletown Junior High School (pseudonym). A visit to my classroom by technology education students

during what I perceived to be an extreme reader-response period captured students with hands clapped to their chin, forehead, cheek, hair, and neck, silently and determinately considering prose. These photographs also depicted groups in heated discussion. Mouths gaped in dialogue as hands pointed to text. Students were captured slapping desktops for added emphasis of their points.

Although both teachers and students described and manifested the concrete characteristics of extreme reader-response experiences, they were unable to suggest how such extreme connections could be called forth on demand. Ultimately, these concrete descriptions of assembled energy are noteworthy and raise the question: Does the physical response phenomenon exhibited during extreme reader-response periods in the classroom setting begin as an individual activity or a collaborative group endeavor?

Interestingly, when questioned about the lived experience of reader-response, students *first* described individual reading situations in which they were involved in silent reading. They never *initially* described an extreme reader-response experience as *resulting* from a classroom discussion. When questioned, they did report that they had encountered a few extreme reader-response experiences in the classroom. These extreme classroom reader-responses involved intense classroom discussions. They used words like “rad”, “wild”, and “crazy”. They portrayed themselves as having been “happy”, “mad” and “sad”. Students reported that they got so “mad” that they “wanted to smack them”, or “just wanted to choke someone”.

This research does suggest that extreme reader-response begins as an individual connective activity. Through individual interest, readers engage with the

literature often becoming unconscious of the reality that surrounds them. In the classroom setting, as students return to the reality of the environment escaping the dream-like state that enveloped them during an individual reader-response period, their interest in the topic read is displayed by a changing concrete embodiment. This changing concrete embodiment in the classroom is displayed through dialogue, facial expressions, and gesturing and promotes a rising energy level that often engages *initially* disengaged students. The assembly of this collaborative energy promotes, but does not assure a collaborative extreme reader-response experience in the classroom setting. The interest element supports but fails to delineate these connections. No outline for harnessing student interest can be found as a set of packaged teacher strategies in any teacher's guide. Likewise, federal and state mandates and local guides fail to offer a set of steps that produce an extreme reader-response experience in the English/language arts classroom. Perhaps the concrete embodiment of interest that improves the collaborative reader-response experience may best be described as a singularly initiated personal connection with an enormous expanse of energy.

The Reader-response Environment from the Student's Perspective

The classroom setting, studded with energy, offers students many opportunities for connection with others in their minute universal environment. Sadly, however, these opportunities for connection often go unmet. The classroom environment is not always a socially accepting and nurturing place. Hearing my students' voices as they tell me of their desire for connection in the classroom is a sobering experience. Their need for a positive environment speaks volumes about

their need for acceptance and fear of inadequacy and failure in the English/language arts classroom.

Tina: My perfect class would be a happy fun place to learn. Everyone would be nice to each other, and there wouldn't be any fighting or arguing of any kind allowed. This is really important in a class where you have to read out loud and talk about stuff. The only things that would be allowed is being nice and acting happily.

Helen: The perfect classroom would have a fun atmosphere. You would laugh and joke around and it would seem very cheerful. The teacher would create the cher by really loving her job.

Kacy: The perfect classroom would be fun but serious. Like all classes we would have rules and challenging studies. The students would know that they could have fun while learning.

Rachel: The perfect classroom would have an atmosphere that would be warm and friendly and work would be interesting.

Holy: The perfect classroom would have a light and friendly atmosphere. The teacher would be nice and fun, but stern enough to keep the class in order. No violence allowed.

Mark: The perfect classroom would be one that is friendly and inviting. The teacher would be nice, caring friendly and active like she loved her job.

Matthew: The perfect classroom would be a fun place to be in. When you walked in, you'd know that we would be doing something different than any other classes. The teacher in this class would be loving, outgoing and playful.

Students' desire for connection with peers and their teacher through social acceptance suggests that Freire (1987) was correct. His belief that every encounter shapes human backgrounds is supported by students' words as they speak of their desire for a positive environment.

Rosenblatt's (1995) contention that the English/language arts classroom is a cauldron of social and cultural issues inherent to that environment is substantiated by

the words of student co-researchers. Inherent environmental issues are a continued concern for students today and should be a consideration of English/language arts teachers. By placing the classroom environment before learning, rules, or the curriculum, students' writings suggest that consideration of the classroom atmosphere is students' first priority. Teachers then should be aware that a classroom environment that accepts and cultivates acceptance will precede any extreme reader-response experience. Only when fear of inadequacy and failure are put to rest through acceptance can greater intellectual accomplishment be achieved.

"The classroom is like a heart. If it is cold it will be dead."

(Notation from Jan's writing)

Authenticity in the English/language Arts Classroom from the Student's Perspective

> In the ideal reading experience, the assignments would be short and fun and we would never have any homework. Every activity we would learn something important, but it would be fun and interesting. We would be able to debate our opinions and participate in class debates. (Notation from Hailey's writing)

In spite of my fourteen years of experience with teenagers in the public school setting, I continue to be impressed with students' persistent desire to learn despite the bombardment by inane lessons. Hailey's words are an illustration that the need to learn is a human concern, yet all human concerns do not necessarily culminate at the same times. Hailey's comments sprang from the prompt: Once you have begun a book or story, what makes you want to continue? Students' questions regarding the prompt began an open class discussion. This discussion evolved into students' desire for the ideal English/language arts classroom. As students' comments and conversations progressed, I hoped that students' written responses would delve

deeply into the ideal reading experience. I wanted to hear about the elements involved in a highly connected reading. Hailey's concern at the time of her comments, however, was with the activity, atmosphere, and product of the English/language arts classroom. Obviously, Hailey was telling me something that day. I am convinced that the upcoming vocabulary assignment written on the board at the front of the room influenced Hailey's comments, was not her idea of a fun activity, would fail to be a great way to spend her free time, and lacked the ability to produce learning that was "important" to her. Hailey was telling me that this upcoming assignment was not relevant to her life and was not a good way to spend time in the English/language arts classroom. To Hailey, debating would have been a better activity and would have helped cultivate the ideal reading experience.

Hailey's words struck me with a reality that I was unprepared for. I had been certain that following the reinvention of myself as a reformed constructivist teacher, I was providing authentic learning experiences for my students. I had, though, fallen into the trap of interspersed prescription. Hailey's words made me realize that the vocabulary lesson she was soon to be assigned was not an authentic learning experience for her. It lacked any link to her real and present world activities and concerns. This lesson may have been only successful in hammering Hailey (and perhaps other students) into stupefied submission with lessons of personal insignificance.

Hailey's words, though not what I had expected, remain important. Her comments awakened me to the insignificance of the vocabulary exercise to Hailey and to my own personal regression. Hailey helped me to realize the need for

continual personal and professional evaluation. While I constructed this research, in part, to add students' voices to the English/language arts debate, I never before fully understood the necessity of perpetual student analysis with the true constructivist approach. Once constructivism is achieved, it is only maintained through consistent teacher reflection. Hailey helped me to understand that each student and class is different. I was following the blueprint of needs that belonged to a former English/language arts class. It was their needs that I had constructed this lesson to fit. The majority of students in this previous class were a very linear bunch who needed to study the vocabulary words and felt uncomfortable without this stabilization prior to reading a story. Hailey, on the other hand, was not a linear thinker and found little, if any value, in studying definitions and constructing sentences spelling and using the vocabulary words correctly. The class Hailey was in also was not a linear thinking class. While this vocabulary lesson did not seem to offer any link to the real or outside world in the most general sense, it also did not offer a link to Hailey's (and probably others in her class) interests. Not only should true constructivism offer a general link to the real or outside world for students to find worth in it, it should also offer authenticity to the students who inhabit the classroom. The changing of students each school year means that the English/language arts teacher must remain in a state of perpetual analysis in order to provide a true constructivist approach for the new and unique classroom of inhabitants.

The Reader-response Experience from the Student's Perspective

Students tell me of their desire to escape the reality of their lives and learn about the lives of others. In everyday conversation they ask about new book titles,

seek advice regarding what to read, and wonder whether or not a book is good. Through this dialogue, students reveal their need for escape. They seek to establish a link to another place and time. Their desire to learn the various paths and life roles available to them while deriving some personal meaning from a reading experience is evidenced by their written statements.

Bell: I am interested in the Harry Potter series. The books make me think I was there…like it was a dream. I smelled the food, I heard the clinking of silver wear, I heard the laughing in the hall. I saw everything perfectly, no fuzzy pictures. They were as clear as day.

Kerrie: A book or story is appealing when I can learn something or figure out what I should do in a situation, or what I should have done in a situation because of a book.

Scott: A great reading experience is when I'm really connected to the book and I can't put it down. Like I'm really interested in it.

Kacy: I get really interested in a book or story when I am so immersed in it its like I'm there or watching it like a movie.

Tina: When I'm curled up on my bed and I feel like I'm there I know the book is appealing because I'm interested in it. Whether I'm in Diagon Alley or if I'm in Troy with Anaxandrea.

Jan: When I'm really interested in a book and i can't stop reading it.

Mark: Great reading is when a writer does a good job on details and they get you interested in the book. Its like you get to be the main character in the story, like a whole new dimension. The author Peg Kheret is the, perfect example of this.

Matthew: Sometimes when I reading I picture the book as a movie in my head and I play it over & over in my head when I am finished.

Students' words imply the ability of marks on paper to evoke a personal connection with the text. This personal connection often begins with a sensory link. The transformation of ink blots dotting a page to the type of authentic mental

transposition that Bell speaks of tells of the creativity contained within the human mind and the human desire to escape its perceived mundane. As sensory and creativity experiences blossom, visual images spring forth and play across the human mind much like the scenes in a movie play across the theatre screen. Seeking escape from the repetitive and a journey toward the novel, students' writings reveal that readers cast themselves as the main characters. These experiences can provide readers with a link to another place and time and provide personal insight as scenes take shape on the big screen of their minds.

> Rachel: I loved Garden of Angels by Lauralene McDaniels. Once I started reading it, I didn't want to stop. I could feel every emotion of the characters, and I felt like I was part of the story. I had a tear in my eye in most parts. It was one of the best books I've read.
>
> Perry: Actually, I love it when I cry or feel the emotions of a story.

Rachel and Perry tell of their ability to withstand the varying emotions of characters. Their words speak volumes about students' desire to learn and their yearning to be accepted by the culture into which they were born. As representatives of their clan, they wish to explore human realities and the emotions that accompany these realities.

The Reader-response Process from the Student's Perspective

> Bell: When I am reading a story my mind usually drifts to other things. Like in the story ["Flowers for Algernon"] when it talks about Miss Kinnian started to cry and ran to the lady's room it reminded me of when my friends brother died, I started to cry in 2nd hour and I ran to the Lady's room. Then another time he [Charlie in "Flowers for Algernon"] was talking about fencing with swards, and I thought of Parent Trap when they are fencing at camp. He also talks about the lab a lot and than makes me think of where my dad works, the Kerr Lab, and my dad always refurs to it as the lab. When I am reading stories with the class it takes a long time, and it is hard for me to keep

my mind with the story because different words always trigger my mind to something else that I'm interested in. Sometimes I don't even realize that my mind is drifting until I get snapped out of it.

Matthew:One of the first things I thought about while reading this book [story-"Flowers for Algernon"] was when he says "What a dope I am" I think of people name-calling. I was in the 6th grade & I saw a bully, way way bigger than me, bullying a handicap student. The Handicap student was trying to get a drink out of the water fountain, & the bully came up & pushed him down & called out "Retarded Idiot! I was trying to get a DRINK!" So the handicap kid started crying really loud, we three were the only one's out in the hall at that time, & that's when I walked over & helped him up & dusted the dirt & dust off of him & then the bully said "Mind your own business punk, or I'll hit you." I said "how about you leave other people alone!" He shoved me & I shoved him down on the ground & he started to get up I pushed him back down & he started to tear up. The handicap kid started laughing at the bully because he got pushed & he felt what it was like to be laughed at. I said "It doesn't feel as good to get pushed down than it is to do the pushing, now is it?" I think he got the point. As for the handicap kid, he was laughing at the sight of the bully on the ground with tears in his eyes!

Perry: At the beginning of the story ["Flowers for Algernon"] when I first read about charley, kids where always making fun of Him and that made me mad. But after the surgery He Had every body still didn't like him because they couldn't make fun of him anymore.

Devin: When Charlie ["Flowers for Algernon"] figured out that they were making fun of him when they said that the delivery boy delivered the wrong package that he was "Pulling a Charlie Gordon", the day after that when he wasn't going to work and told his landlady to call him in sick, I just felt sorry for him because he was just sulking all day and that song I like came into my head, "Don't laugh at me don't call me names don't get your Pleasure from my pain in God's eyes were all the same some day will all have perfect wings don't laugh at me"

Tina: When Charlie ["Flowers for Algernon"] got drunk and his friends were making fun of him. It reminded me of when kids used to make fun of me in elementary school. The Roschach inkblot made me think of those blue butterflies that I love. When his brain was deteriorating it reminded me of my best-friend April's grandma. She died of Alstimers Disease.

Jan: When Charlie ["Flowers for Algernon"] first met Algernon I thought of a mouse that my math teacher had in sixth grade. On progress

report 2 Charlie said he failed a test, that made me think of a test I took in math one year that I failed. When he first got the operashun (his spelling) he said it didn't hurt and that reminded me of when I got some teeth pulled. On April 30 his teacher said something about the bible with the part about Adam and Eve and that makes me think of when im in bible study at E.T. and first learning of that. April 16 he learned the comma and that really makes me think of when I was in like 1st or 2nd grade learning commas. While I was learning what it was the teacher told the class to sit in a circle and all the boys wanted to sit by me. I was like 'wow' lol.

Rachel: The process that went through my head [while reading "Flowers for Algernon"] was that I could still pay attension to the story but certain words & phrases made me think about old memories or something that has to do with those phrases. My first thing I thought of was whenever Charlie was @ the begging of his operasion & he kept writing operation spelt operashun & it made me think of the game operation & when I was like 7 & I played that game with my friends. I loved that game__it was my favorite. My second distant thought was when Charlie wrote about an Island, In third grade I got put in a corner for for arguing w/ my teacher about how to spell & pronounce island. Whether it was i-land or is-land. My third thought was how throughout the operation his spelling and grammer got better & better then got worse & worse. My forther thought was when he wrote "mix up all kinds of punctuation" & so it made me think of my friends & I always eating cand called mix-ups. He also wrote that he had been given a lab of his own. IN the story he meant like a science laboratory, but I thought of this chocolate lab puppy I want. Charlie was doing his research in his lab he called it the Algernon-Gordon affect & the name Gordon reminded me of Gordo, a character off a tv series. In conclusion, although my mind wandered & I thought about other things I could still pay attension & understand the story.

Morgan: The process I went through in my mind as I red "flowers for Algernon" were all sorts of emotions. In the beginning of the story, I felt kind of sorry for Charlie because he seemed so happy but he wasn't really sure about the world around him. People would make jokes about him and make fun of him, and he would laugh along thinking they were laughing with him. He felt like he had it made, but he knew he wasn't like most people, he knew he needed/wanted to be smarter.

During the middle of the story after his operation, it surprised me how short it took for him to become from, 1st grade level to a complete genius. I know that he would be a lot happier knowing about everything around him, and people wouldn't make fun of him

> anymore. But things were getting worse, he was forgetting things he had said, written, read, he seemed to just use everything! That is, when I started to get mad! I was angrey because why would these docters operate on a man to make him "smarter" and not knowing if it would work or if it would kill him! They should have worked on that mouse, first and see what happens! But instead they worked on a helpless man! Not telling him the possibilities, and what might happen to him!
>
> My anger turned in to disappointment and sadness. Disappointment because of how those docters just let him go, and now they probably knew what was going to happen to Charlie. Sadness because Charlie had left/lost everything: The women he loved, his home, his job. He left it all. The story was really good, and I didn't think I can feel like that over some story.
>
> The End

As students' experiences extend with their absorption in literature and the life experiences offered there, they return to their roots reflecting upon their lives. Drawing on past personal experience, students reason through the text and their own lives achieving connections and gaining new understandings. Students' writings depict a reader-response process wrought with mental activity and influenced by both the text and the reader's past experiences. Meaning from the text is constructed as experiences and imagery promoted by prose travel across the big screen of the mind.

Consistently, my students, through stories or discussions, either tell of or hint at personal interests. Colleagues portray the interest element as important to them as well. The interest element appears to be an enormous piece of the reader-response puzzle for the word "interest" does not disappear from thoughts, writings, or discussions over reader-response. The term was bandied about by students and teachers as I related the physical qualities of the reader-response experience, and discussed the value of the environment and purpose. Now, as I explore the valuable

reader-response experience, the word re-appears. No doubt, interest is a personal matter. The boon of one person's interest may be the bane of another's. In an effort to explicate a more holistic understanding of the important interest element, I questioned students specifically about interest during interviews asking them what makes them interested in a book or story. This line of questioning allowed me to identify elements that create interest for students.

Relatedness from the Student's Perspective

Sean: Like, um. Well. Like the Harry Potter books. I love those books. Well, like once you get to know them you feel like they're your friends. You just kind of get into their head and what they like and what you like. Like when I first read the Harry Potter book, I felt like I was a lot like Hermine and um, I figured that if there really was a person like her, she would make a really good friend. And just the stuff that they do together is the stuff me and my friends would do together, so it's like you can relate to them and that's interesting. It's also interesting to see what they will do and like you can kind of compare things to what I would do. I sometimes take it slowly and I imagine something that happens going the opposite direction and see what other problems would come up because of that and different things like that.

Kacy: The name of the book makes me interested because you think, hum. Wonder what this book is about. Then I read the summary and you think, oh, I know about that, like one had a song, and I knew that song, so then it makes it kind of personal so I'm like okay, well, I like that so I'll read this. S o it's like if something makes something click in your mind so it makes it personal and you think maybe this will like have something to do with my life right now.

Morgan: I'm interested in love stories. Sometimes I pretend I'm the girl that is with the really hot guy, particularly if he seems hotter than my boyfriend at the time.

Helen: I like stories that have meaning. Like if it has a purpose. If it is helping people or something like the "Diary of Anne Frank" it makes me think of my life more. When it has more meaning

than like a mystery story or something. I compare my life to the people more. I relate to it.

Continuously, my students speak of the need to feel related to the literature and a desire for literature to help them construct meaning from their lives. Their desire to feel connected to others is closely related to their conception of self-worth. As students work to establish this conception of self-worth, they search for bits of information through literature to help them build perspectives. Literature offers students a venue through which to pursue life, its meanings, and its relatedness to them.

Transference from the Student's Perspective

The findings of this research suggest a desire to share information with others in the world—a transference of knowledge. Not only do students' tales insist that the environment, the authenticity, and the relatedness involved in the experience all impact the reader's-response, but also important is their yearning to know, assist others, and make a difference. Students' desire to discover the reality of their world and to acquire the knowledge that will propel their present world to greater discoveries is inspiring. Students, devoid of prescription, do aspire. They escape the present constructing new dimensions of reality.

Devin: When I was little, my mother was helping me learn how to read. I remember setting on the couch reading aloud to her to show off how smart I was. She helped me on words I couldn't pronounce. Although I probably didn't understand the book "Haggedy Peg" (besides the fact that the witch scared me). I still like to read. Now I set on a couch and read to my younger cousins and look at the pure joy the book can bring to them as they tell me about what they imagined and saw as I read. Its one of the best feelings in the world.

Rachel: I don't like just reading a story and answering questions. I like actually talking about and understanding what I read. Other people's views helps me to see the big picture and helps me learn.

Bell: I like discussing stories. I like being able to speak our opinions on stories and issues in stories (as long as we don't get disrespectful). As we get more opinionated, we learn more about ourselves and the people around us. That way we can help ourselves and other people too.

Youth today endure a great deal of negativity. They hear tales of, "When I was your age…" and "We wouldn't have been allowed to get away with that." Undoubtedly, times have changed. Those that espouse these sentiments of classification have changed themselves. They are no longer the bright-faced positive youth that they once were. Daily contact with enthusiastic twenty-first century students has inspired my hopefulness for their generation. My students have taught me that hope for the future is not a lesson in futility. Students today are not a dysfunctional collection any more than students were thirty plus years ago. Like their predecessors, students today yearn for knowledge, liberation, and a peaceful environment. They create mental images and situations while dreaming of perfect cultures. Someday their mental reflections and aspirations may help them construct a better world for themselves and for others. I have learned that I owe my twenty-first century students a positive nurturing environment that inspires transference.

Important Topics from the Teacher's Perspective

Teachers rarely stop talking. When they are together, having common interests and concerns, they become prolific orators. Ease-dropping on their conversations and participating in their discussions allowed me to record a great deal

of information. The following discussions were advanced by my peers and are important for they offer insight into the issues to which teachers devote time.

The Environment from the Teacher's Perspective

"Do you think there is enough camaraderie here [at Middletown (pseudonym)] among teachers?"

This question was posed during lunch break in the teacher's lounge by a senior teacher near retirement. Prompted by her query, dialogue among those teachers present began.

Teacher 1: Probably not. We probably could do more to develop a sense of unity around here.

Teacher 2: I know that I am just in such a hurry to get everything done that time just gets away from me. The first thing I know, I've only spoken to those on my end of the hall, and I haven't even seen anyone else for a month.

Teacher 3: I think if we would get together and talk more we would have less stress and a better place to work. It's almost like we have developed clicks just like our students.

Like students, teachers' words express their desire for personal connection with those in their environment. Teachers' expressions of need for a positive work environment echo students' need for an accepting place to explore and learn. This synonymous element speaks volumes for it reveals a common need for human acceptance and a feeling of connection with others in the environment.

Teacher 4: Do you think Mr. Simms (principal [pseudonymn]) does enough to build camaraderie among teachers?

Teacher 5: I haven't noticed anything he has done toward that end.

Teacher 6: Well, I don't think…it's not his responsibility to build friendships among teachers.

Teacher 4: I think when everyone is so ostracized and stressed that they're biting everyone's heads off and it's affecting the school, then it is his responsibility.

Teacher 7: And it wouldn't hurt if he wasn't so aloof himself.

Teachers' words suggest that a connection with each other, as well as their leader, can improve the environment by reducing stress levels. By choosing to discuss this matter over lunch one Friday afternoon rather than discussing upcoming Criterion Reference Tests or plans for the weekend, teachers' actions revealed that the school atmosphere was a priority. Teachers' thoughts also revealed that when a negative atmosphere arises, they look to the leader for restorative action, in this case, the principal. These outward expressions of concern for the environment suggest that the atmosphere produced by the environment is a basic, lower level need that must be met before concern for other achievements will grow. Like students, teachers' words echo the need for connection with others in their environment. These writings and conversations suggest that a negative atmosphere may disenfranchise all those within that environment preventing them from meeting the challenges of higher level needs when a basic, lower level need has not been fulfilled. My research suggests that the environment is a primary concern and should receive prioritized attention from English/language arts teachers. The delicate nature of the human psyche is apparent. Teachers must reflect seriously and act judiciously as they help create and sustain a positive environment where critical issues are explored.

Authenticity from the Teacher's Perspective

In February of 2005, the Oklahoma Academic Achievement Award provided forty-three Oklahoma schools with a one-million dollar shared grant. Schools

attaining this award showed quantitative gains in students' reading and math scores. A newspaper article printed in The Oklahoman (Bratcher, 2005, p. 9A) told of this award and named an area school as a recipient. Returning to school on Monday, teachers congregating in the teachers' lounge discussed the article remarking that Lowrance Public School's (pseudonym) performance had earned them the recognition of the town. Teachers recognized the significance of this distinction noting that funding for the Academic Achievement Award had been provided by the federal government through the No Child Left Behind Act. Soon the levity in the room turned to cynicism as teachers reflected on the No Child Left Behind Act and its demand for more testing in the public school system. Linking Lowrance's testing achievement to greater and greater performance demands and the tendency of teachers to meet those rising demands by teaching to the test, the atmosphere in the room became first quiet signifying reflection, then bitter.

Teacher 8: If all they want is high numbers, then why don't we all just forget about helping the kids and just teach the test? We'd have a lot less stress I think.

Teacher 9: But where does it end? There's a limit to rising numbers. When is good good enough?

Teacher 10: Well, you know, teaching to the test doesn't offer anything beneficial to students when they graduate. They won't even use most of that stuff, much less remember it.

Teacher 11: It sure doesn't interest them. I'd rather take a beating than go over that Fine Arts test with my students. You should have seen their faces today. Just stone cold. And I have nothing to offer when they ask, "Why do we have to take this test?"

Teacher 12: How does that work for you [Teacher 11]? An English teacher teaching art and music?

Teacher 11: Not well, I'll tell you. What do I know about that stuff? I never took band in school and I sure can't draw. How did English teachers get stuck with this anyway? Does anyone know?

I know these teachers as intelligent professionals, yet their exasperation with testing requirements and accountability standards seems to render them speechless and inept when confronted by students' queries. The words they were able to utter collectively indicate a belief that testing and teaching to the tests offer students no real-world application. Their commentary suggests the importance of authenticity in all its forms. Not only is there an evident need for serious reflection regarding the authenticity of federal, state, and local testing demands, but also there is the implication that English/language arts teachers too must be aware of the need for authenticity. Perhaps students are exasperated by subject tests they perceive as purposeless. Perhaps they too are rendered speechless and inept by subject tests that measure, classify, and stratify. My data can offer no definitive commentary on these concerns, yet it is evident that serious reflection regarding the purpose and authenticity of each lesson and test must be a driving force in the English/language arts teacher's mind. Remaining comfortable with the status quo will not offer authenticity in a general or an individual sense. As classes and class inhabitants change, so to does the measure of authenticity that is gauged by real-world application and true individual interest. For this reason, no federal, state or local test can attain authenticity for there can be no definitive set of test questions that reach the mark of real-world application and true *individual* interest. By standardizing boundaries and ignoring the authentic, federal, state, and local factions are stifling the uniqueness of students, limiting students' knowledge, and promoting the perception

that knowledge is disposable. English/language arts teachers must be careful not to follow in the footsteps of federal, state, and local organizations and factions hammering out lessons and tests that are not authentic and do not provide true interest.

The Reader-response Experience from the Teacher's Perspective

Literature lends a feeling of relatedness and hopefulness. Teachers' feel this connection too. Although I did not seek the information obtained through lunch gatherings in the teachers' lounge, inquiries about the progress of my research often turned into teacher discussions. These discussions I recorded in my journal. One such discussion occurred as I was conducting research that querried students about what made a book or story appealing. From inquisitions about my research questions, teachers' thoughts and comments naturally manifested. Teacher consultants offered information about the interest factor involved in the reading experience. Their off-handed remarks told of the need for relatedness, inspiration and an emotional connection.

Teacher 1: I am interested in reading something when I can relate to the material or it inspires me to explore the subject more.

Teacher 13: Anything that makes my life easier. Uplifting stories lower my stress level. Reading for personal understanding of a situation reduces my confusion. Letters from a loved one improves my attitude.

Teacher 14: A great personal reading experience effects my emotions. When you get finished reading, you feel like you have seen it and lived through it, instead of just reading the words on the page. When you finish the book, you can't get the story out of your head. You keep repeating it over and over.

Teacher 11: I think something that has a great personal impact upon the reader really captures them. It doesn't have to be a major

topic. If a person comes away from the reading with a different or changed attitude towards a subject or topic then the reading has had a personal impact. If the change is a major influence then I would think it is a great personal impact. Some people might think the change is life-changing but I am not sure I like that term. I believe life-changing events can occur and no one knows but the person himself.

Teacher 15: A great reading experience is one which envelopes you so completely that you feel you gained experience and insight primarily through its reading. For example, I related many things I felt and had experienced to what I learned many years ago in my psychology classes. To me psychology opened a new door to understanding and dealing with the outside world. Perhaps I experienced this initially because when I took my first psychology course at EBU (pseudonym), I was working nights at The Meadows (pseudonym) as a house parent for special needs residents. The contrasting and sometimes similar worlds of The Meadows and EBU provided a unique opportunity to look into my role as a caregiver and as a friend to individuals I encountered in both environments. I worked midnight to 8:00 A.M., so on some days, I left The Meadows to attend my first class at EBU.

Teacher 16: Enjoying the story so much that you feel that you are in the story is what makes a book interesting to me. You have a "five senses" experience where it actually seems as if you are a part of the story. Just recently I read "Night of the Twisters" to my students. They seemed to really follow along and were swept away by the storm. Before I read the book, I talked about it approaching tornado season in our state. I allowed them to tell any stories that they could to connect their experiences to the story. I talked about living in OCC (pseudonym) in 1999 when the May 3 tornado hit. Then we read the story. It is of a couple of pre-teenage boys and their experiences during a tornado in Nebraska. The students related to the children, and because of the amount of tornados in [our state], they related to the storm.

Teacher 1: I think I am seduced by anything that I can identify with. When I can identify with a character or a situation, my commitment to the book increases and I have a hard time putting it down—even when I need to.

Teacher 2: If an author can just make me feel something, I will be hooked. It doesn't really matter if I feel happy or sad, or something else.

> If I can just feel something, I can escape. You know, I have been so bogged down in this quagmire with my divorce that I almost feel numb. Just to feel something makes me think I will have a life again.

Teacher 17: As odd as this may sound, a great reading experience is when I feel sad near the end because I know the book is over…and I don't want it to be.

The urgency to feel a part of the enormous universe of energy surfaced again in these individual conversations with teachers. The hopefulness contained in such statements is evident. The reader's hope for a strand by which to identify and harness a portion of the universal energy reflects the human compulsion to connect with others.

The Reader-response Process from the Researcher's Perspective

"A Rose for Emily" brought with it tacit knowledge of the reader-response experience. Needing a break from my professional life and the entities of the reader-response experience, ironically I reached for something to read one Saturday afternoon. Selecting an anthology from my library shelf, I chose a thick text with a garnet red spine. Opening Library of Great American Writing (Untermeyer, 1960), I found myself in the middle of a short story. I began turning the pages until the beginning of "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner lay before me. I began to read. I read the short story in its entirety before thinking of anything else; the laundry, the mail, the television, my research.

After completing the story I had an, "Oh, wow", experience and went for my research journal. Retrieving it from my car, I recorded the actions I have described to you. I recorded the acts and processes of my selection and having read the entire story before journeying back to the present and an awareness of the duties and

responsibilities that lay before me on that Saturday afternoon. I sat gazing, almost deliriously at the wall. As I sat on the carpeted floor, a focal knowledge became subsidiary. There had been intervals that I had paused if not stopped reading. Where were they? During these pauses in reading, I had not returned to the actuality of the present or my present surroundings, but my awareness of the printed words on the page had left my consciousness. I quickly jotted down what I could remember. My awareness of the print had left as I pondered the word "cupolas" (p. 1560) wondering, "Just how is that word pronounced?" I had heard it pronounced at least three different ways in my life. I hadn't stopped; though, to look up the pronunciation in a nearby dictionary.

I had read the words "Union and Confederate soldier" (p. 1560) and thought, "One of my relatives was a Confederate soldier." I then wished the genealogical research I had done a few summers ago had produced more information on Captain John Morris. My mind then had taken a divergent path recalling my father's army medals and duffle bag. As a child I had loved looking at those medals. I had loved the way they caught the light, their bright and colorful fabric, and the cold feel of steel in my hand and against my cheek. I loved the steely blue color and grainy texture of the duffle bag. Emblazoned on both sides of its scarred surface was US ARMY printed in black permanent marker. The duffle sported black leather handles that had made it an easy travel companion for me. In the 1960's it stored a multitude of intrigue for me: bright glass Christmas balls, royal blue threaded and plastic hooked ornaments, sparkling "danglers" (as I called them), garland, blinking lights, silver hooks, red and white fur stockings, and probably much, much more.

Jarring myself from this nostalgic reverie, I had continued reading encountering the sentence, "Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying." (p. 1560) This sentence sealed my interest in the story. I recalled having re-read it three times. I had been contemplating how people in authority (like Colonel Sartoris) often abuse their power. I had witnessed this in my lifetime, and it angered me. I tell you truthfully now that I have misused power a time or two in my younger years (I hope it doesn't continue today), but this thought did not cross my mind at the time. I recalled it having been implied that, as a teacher, I should stroke the egos and submit to the wishes of the wealthy upper echelon in my own town. I remained at least aggravated if not angered as I continued reading. The paragraph that began "Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron-remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity" (p. 1560) found me still thinking of those elitist persons in my own town who require, if not demand, special treatment. I began piecing the two sentences together. This preference was being offered to Miss Emily by Colonel Sartoris, in the form of an invented tale. I wondered why he proffered such a contrived scheme. Was it a cultural thing that instigated his actions? Was it a cultural thing that dictated the actions and statements of those I had encountered in my past--those who had succumbed to the will of the wealthy, elite, upper echelon? With only these three

paragraphs and many more thoughts, I had been caught. Ensnared in the weaver's thread, I had become interested and continued reading. My mind had been active and engaged with the text as I had traversed the written words jumping from one sentence and thought to another. I remained in a state of anticipatory mental activity critically evaluating and inquiring as I continued. I had wondered, "How will this end? What happened to Homer Barron?" I even linked Miss Emily's persona to a woman that I remembered from childhood. Joe, a frail snip of a woman, iron-white hair, dry, onionskin flesh, and a brittle skeletal frame. Joe, who in her younger years had seemed to be remote, graceful, and stately. A vegetarian, she ate bean sprouts, and sipped green tea—all novelties to me. Joe, who in later years, and losing her faculties, ventured outside in only her white bra and underwear, the pink liner of a Kotex visible and prominent. She must have been eighty. Finally, I concluded Faulkner's story in a questioning and reflective state. I wondered, "Why is this story titled, 'A Rose for Emily'?"

At this point, it was time to eat the dinner my husband had prepared. Over a lavish meal of Gorton's fish sticks and Kraft macaroni and cheese, I brought up "A Rose for Emily." I asked him if he had ever read the story. He had not. I first told him about Colonel Sartoris. I recanted how the Colonel, also the Mayor, had excused Miss Emily's taxes with a contrived story. We discussed the societal implications and class status at work in the events and in twenty-first century American life. I finally asked him how to pronounce cupola. He gave me his perceived pronunciation of the word and we adjourned from the table. I began the clean-up process in the kitchen. He soon returned with a dictionary and the correct pronunciation of cupola.

The following day found me curious about arsenic, the poison that, as a child, I had found in the big red barn on my Grandpa Farmer's property. The substance that my mother had warned me of stating, "It's rat poisoning. Don't ever mess with that." Miss Emily's seeking of arsenic from the druggist had revived these childhood memories. I looked up arsenic's uses on the internet and learned that it is also used to produce glass, ceramics, and preserve hides.

That evening, after a Sunday of relaxation, I returned to "A Rose for Emily", not because I needed to do so in any task-oriented way. Close reflection of the reading had provided insight into the reader-response process and I was thankful, but I felt I had enough information to understand reader-response. After all, I had jotted down many notes and came to several understandings, though they were superficial. I had notations relating to word pronunciation, word and image connections linking to personal background, and sentences associated with personal perceptions and feelings. How wrong I was. I soon learned that there was much more to understand about reader-response.

I returned to "A Rose for Emily" that night wondering why it was titled "A Rose for Emily". I began searching the text for the word "rose". This act required a second reading that brought about new insights. I will not now, nor could I then describe all of the thought patterns that occurred as I re-read the story, however, several noteworthy points stand out.

I began by questioning the title and its appropriateness for the story "A Rose for Emily." I had not encountered any literal roses. I sensed that it must have a deeper meaning. I started attending to the thoughts and actions of the characters in

the story. I wondered, "Are there different rules for different people in the story? Are there different rules for people today?" I believed Miss Emily's family to no longer be dominant in the town, so the people who had held allegiances to her and her clan were no longer in power. I found it amusing that while the townspeople's perceptions of Miss Emily had changed, the new generation still held her to the prescriptive conduct of her former (dominant) class. They seemed to believe that she should not associate with lower class people, yet they believed her not to now be of the caliber it would take to qualify for remitted tax status. I began to notice the personal connections that were missing now and had once allowed and provided Miss Emily special treatment. As the administration of the town was changing, so were Miss Emily's connections. She was becoming, among other things, an entity from which the town could line its coffers—not a regal and dominant icon.

I began to wonder about societal implications and noticed some individuals could not stand the smell around Miss Emily's house. They complained, yet Judge Stevens, who was eighty and near Miss Emily's age and of her era, would not address the issue head-on. In the end, the Board of Aldermen with an aged majority chose to cover-up the smell with lime.

I ended this second reading having noted each time the word "rose" was used. It was used a total of four times. In the story it was used as a verb (p. 1561) and as an adjective twice on p. 1567. It was only used as a noun in the title (p. 1560). This I wondered about. Why was the story named "A Rose for Emily" when no literal roses appeared in the story? It was not a literal meaning. I finally declared the rose to be a figurative meaning. A rose, the traditional symbol of love implied a love for Emily,

but who really loved Emily. Not Homer, he preferred men. Not her dad. He oppressed her. Not the town's people. They begrudged her. The only loyal person in her life was the negro man servant—or was the love for Emily given by William Faulkner who through interconnected writing told a tale of the divine and the profane that laces society and impacts lives. Did this story actually represent his love for Emily—a woman who did not deserve the negativity that she received by a group of self-serving others?

I had enjoyed the story. Even the second reading had found me involved. I was critically evaluating and inquiring again.

The ending had just blown me away. It had been a shock during the first reading, but the social and cultural implications that I have outlined had overwhelmed me forcing me to give them prioritized attention. At the conclusion of this second reading, I was intrigued with the prospect of this dead man having been upstairs for such a long time; a secret mortuary. I re-read, a third time, 'The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotten beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of patient and biding dust "(p. 1567).

I pondered these lines. The word inextricable was important for it held significance to me. It meant many things. It meant that dominance, hypocrisy and sin are embedded within society. It also meant that love, complete with all of its longing, is embedded within society. The positive and negative were embedded

within society yesterday and remain today. The layer of dust indicated the secrecy of lives and worlds.

I had enjoyed the read. A man who would write so openly and yet so cryptically and complexly about human nature was interesting to me. I purposefully found a biographical sketch of William Faulkner (in Untermeyer, 1960, p. 1543). I wanted to know what made this writer tick. I perused this sketch learning that Faulkner had been interested in writing for most of his life and that he never graduated from high school.

I walked away from the story feeling satisfied that I had had a valid reader's-response and that I could write about it. How it had helped me to better teach literature I did not then consciously know. At that moment I did not care. I had enjoyed the tale, and I had made progress toward an understanding of the reader-response process.

Weeks passed. I poured over my journal, interviews with students, interviews with teachers, students' reflective writings, and students' assignments. The pieces of the puzzle were there, but they were scattered. I had not been able to link them in any significant way. Suddenly, as I pondered the notes outlining my own reader-response with "A Rose for Emily", the connection leapt from the page. I had been so interested in the story because I had had an emotional connection to it. It was all there in my notes. It had been there ever since I had taken my break from the mundane and picked up "A Rose for Emily" for a pleasurable read. "Union and Confederate soldier" held an emotional tie for me because my ancestor had been a Confederate soldier. Obviously, I did not know John Morris, for he died long before

my August, 1965 birthday, yet historical and genealogical research had moved me closer to the Civil War and an understanding of the trials and tribulations of the times.

Sprouted memories of my own childhood, my father's army duffle bag and army medals certainly held strong emotional ties. They were my stories. The foundation of my beginning. They were mine, and they were personal.

Numerous lines regarding special treatment of the upper class and those in power evoked strong feelings of injustice and personal reflections and applications. This outraged me as I pondered the culture that shapes these injustices. Certainly these were emotional responses.

I had an emotional connection even with Miss Emily. She was the Joe of my childhood, a proud yet pitiful figure. Someone who had both intrigued and entertained me. The exploration of arsenic was connected to my childhood memories and happy times. My mother who had declared, "Don't ever mess with that" had been a spirited, vivacious and capable woman as she instructed me on the importance of staying away from arsenic, not what she was now—six feet under and a cancer victim.

My attention to the changing society in Yoknapatowpha County brought about by time and a younger generation interested me. A recent twenty-year reunion held without my attendance and the approach of the forty-year mark that I have now reached coupled with a dangerous fall through the attic resulting in blood clots on my brain had caused me to realize my own mortality.

The use of the word "rose" and its prominent position in the title held interest for me as well. As a language, literature, and composition teacher, analyzing

language, its uses, and its effect is near to my heart. It is my livelihood. It is what I do. It is who I am.

An investigation of the thoughts expressed in my personal journal revealed the emotionally charged words dominance, hypocrisy, sin, love, and secrecy and noted the positive and negative sides of society and people.

The emotional connection to the story and therefore the writer, forced me to learn more about Faulkner. I reached out and backward in time by visiting Faulkner's biographical sketch, and I reached inward making connections with this author. I, like Faulkner, wanted to write. I wanted to tell the tales of life in a small centrally located state and town.

The emotional connection was what had gained my interest on the first page of the story. The emotional connection was what had enabled me to finish the first reading of "A Rose for Emily" before realizing that I had not intended to read for so long. The emotional connection had caused me to speak to my husband about the story, look up the word arsenic, re-read the story, revisit the conclusion, and learn more about William Faulkner. An emotional thread had been the connecting fiber that kept me thinking, returning, critically inquiring, and evaluating the prose. The emotional connection allowed me to personally connect with the text, applying it to my own background, society, culture, and situation(s). Without the emotional connection, I would have done what I have done so many times before. I would have laid the book down, never exploring its hidden treasures and partaking of its fountain of knowledge.

It was this emotional connection that had led me into deeper and deeper personal and literary territory enabling me to embrace the text seeking greater understanding and more knowledge. Yet this emotional connection was not present as I sought a text to begin my pleasure read. There was only the need to find escape from the mundane and ordinary.

As I looked over students' written and oral responses to my queries and dialogue about literature, this time the meaning leapt from students' words.

Brent: It needs something--like a pull that makes you want to read the book.

Lin: I like reading sad books. It makes me thankful for what I have. I like mysteries and books that have a point.

L.W.: I want to immerse myself into a adventure that I can't do myself. They make me feel like I'm bad.

Nate: Most stories start out slow and dull. I like it when it starts and gets detailed and interesting fast, and I like it when I know something about the things that are going on in the book. That way I can really feel the book.

With limited language, students' words this time spoke to me. With a wealth of personal information available to me through the use of my journal, and armed with students' written and oral testimonials, I could now understand. I began to gain a graduated perspective of the reader-response experience.

Readers, unable to escape the desire for love and belongingness, need an emotional connection on all levels. Within the learning environment, they need to feel accepted before they are willing to offer and explore thoughts, connections, and concepts related to the literature read. From the literature, they desire the same emotional connection in order to "really feel the book" (notation from Nate's

writing). This emotional connection, as suggested by this research, provides readers with a feeling of authenticity and relatedness because it pertains to them. When a thought, connection, or concept is apprehended, students want to transfer this information and knowledge to others.

Looking back now, I realize that the overarching themes of this research were present in my own background if I would only have paused long enough to reflect on my own experiences. As a rookie teacher, I had been dropped into a foreign world of teaching. Having no experience with eighth grade students, discipline, or curriculum, each day was a new and often unsettling adventure into reality. This was truly the sink or swim approach to life, and I was barely keeping my head above water. Each evening I would prepare for the next day's classes making sure that I knew the material to be taught. Connective reflection—I never even though of it. I was consumed with keeping my head above the water—and to what water level was I to be measured? Today I know that social and cultural expectations weighed heavily upon me. I was a product of the "apprenticeship of observation" approach. Observing teachers as they went about their daily rituals in the classroom had molded me. I had become them, subconsciously striving to mimic the prescribed teacher manikin and gain the respect and acceptance of students and colleagues. This respect and acceptance would provide the emotional connection that I desired.

Children Learn What They Live

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith
in themselves and in those about them.
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is
a nice place in which to live.
(Nolte and Harris, 1998)

Only when my eighth grade students' complacency grew did I began to evaluate the English/language arts course description that I had imposed. Mentally revisiting my own experiences, I had remembered the joy of reading in Mrs. Goddard's class. I tried it with my own students with good results. My students relaxed, focused, and discussed the prose. A lifetime of social and cultural teachings, however, infringed upon these students' learning opportunities. I retreated to the safety and security of the "apprenticeship of observation" method with a feeling of uneasiness. "The Shadow" now hounded me. At that time, I did not understand that the internal uneasiness that I felt was internal conflict. The pedagogy that students responded to in the English/language arts classroom was not the one I had witnessed during my education and certainly not the one that I believed was required of me in order to gain the acceptance and respect of my colleagues and students and provide the emotional reward that I subconsciously desired. Instead, the method I then utilized was a prescriptive one adopted through immersion and acceptance of the social and cultural norms of the teaching profession. As I gained greater experience

with teaching and students, I developed greater internal conflict and a growing shadow.

As educational mandates and reforms seeking improvements and imposing prescriptives mount, many educators may bear the burden of the shadow as well. Prescriptives are in direct conflict with the individual exploratory nature of each unique classroom culture. For this reason, students' and teachers' voices must be heard by those in power. These perspectives will offer a more holistic view of the nuances and motivations of learning. Educational improvements that are structured without their voices will only make public schools less effective than they are today. A more irrelevant mechanical institution will be the result of mandates and reforms constructed without their voices. Not understanding what is authentic and offers twenty-first century students feelings of relatedness, "improvements" will fail.

Conclusions: *What is the experience of reader-response?*

As I look back over my experiences as a public school teacher, I have sought to guide students toward an extreme reader-response experience my entire fourteen year career. I willed for them a literature experience involving a depth of literary engagement and a personal connection with the text.

Before I began this inquiry, I envisioned that an investigation of the reader-response experience would provide me with a list of elements utilized by readers when engaged and connected with the prose. Provided with this list, I would then be able to help students achieve and maintain extreme connectedness with the literature.

What I now understand is that although elements of the reader-response experience may be extracted from the depictions presented by both student co-

researchers and teacher consultants, the elements themselves will not offer a connection with the prose in the absence of a personal connection with the people in the environment in which the investigation takes place. An environment of nurtured acceptance and respect provides the necessary foundation for exploration, willing risk-taking, and discovery. It is the individual environmental connection that begins the energy level necessary for connection with the enormous universe of knowledge.

> I have come to a frightening conclusion.
> I am the decisive element in the classroom.
> It is my personal approach that creates the climate.
> It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
> As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous.
> I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.
> I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
> In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be
> Escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized.
> (Ginott, 1972, p. 15)

In classrooms across our land, it is the action of the teacher that begins the extreme reader-response experience by cultivating an accepting and respectful environment. It is the teacher who must nurture positive relationships with students. It is the teacher who must monitor and promote positive relationships among students. It is the teacher who must invest time learning about the students that inhabit the classroom. It is the teacher who must strive to remain in contact with the ever-changing culture. It is the teacher who must pull from this knowledge to offer literature that is of interest to *each unique* ethnographic class. It is the teacher who must allow the class to select literature of interest to them. It is the teacher who must then stand aside and allow students to find an emotional link to the prose.

With that said, this research does suggest that prominent elements of the reader-response experience do exist. Certainly, students feel the need for authenticity

with what they spend time investigating. They, therefore, must feel that the literature offered provides some link to the real-world. As cultures change, so too does the real-world outside the school doors. As years pass and classes and students change, the authenticity of literature changes as well. The *authentic* to one class may be *extraneous* to another class just down the hall and certainly in the years to come. In order for English/language arts teachers to provide reading experiences that meet with students' real-world measurement, they must remain in perpetual analysis learning about the lives and interests of their students. Certainly, the lives and interests of students in any given class will not be identical, yet as products of a shared cultural and social classroom environment, similarities and differences may be explored.

Kerrie: I think it is really interesting when I get so hung-up on a book that I cry. If I get that interested in a book, then it's good.

Tina: Weird stuff is interesting. Like murder mysteries and I don't know why I like it, but I like it. I watch scary movies. I really like scary movies. Exciting things are good.

Morgan: I am interested in suspenseful and funny stuff. I also like anything about the Jews and Hitler, but it makes me sad when people are mean to other people.

Hailey: Books about the Holocaust are interesting to me. The first time I read one of those, it was The Cage, it really scared me. I kept wondering what was going to happen and thinking what if that had been me.

Ultimately, it is the heart that instructs reading experiences that are valuable in the English language arts classroom.

Summary

This chapter explained the research process utilized in this study. It provided the results of student, teacher, and researcher data related to the reader-response experience. Finally, this chapter offered holistic conclusions for the question: *What is the experience of reader-response.*

CHAPTER 5

This chapter offers conclusions regarding the question: *What is the experience of reader-response from the students' and teachers' perspectives?* In this chapter I consider the heuristic methodology and its appropriateness for perspective-seeking research. I attempt to explain, if not bring closure, to "The Shadow". I compare the findings of this research with literature discussed in Chapter 2 and comment on the implications of this study for the reader and myself as an educator. Finally, I offer recommendations for school reform within the English/language arts discipline and provide suggestions for English/language arts teachers as indicated by this study's findings.

Comprehension Through the Heuristic Methodology

This research is a result of a fourteen year search that began my rookie year as a classroom teacher at Orbit (pseudonym). My students there would not engage with my grammar-for-grammar's sake approach to the English/language arts, yet they would engage with the literature that I read to them in class. A product of a traditional public school system where grammar was the curriculum and a life-long observer of the direct instruction model, the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) method was carved into my psyche. This traditional and well-accepted approach to the English/language arts, however, was failing to engage my students. The opposition of these factors promoted a very personal internal conflict. Over the course of a fourteen year period, I grappled with the English/language arts curriculum and questioned*: What is the experience of reader-response*? This struggle to understand I named "The Shadow" because of its persistent pursuit.

Still seeking the appropriate course description for the English/language arts classroom and the best ways to teach English/language arts, I began the pursuit of a Ph.D. in English Education in August of 2002. Holding a bachelor of science, a bachelor of education, a master of science, and a master of education, I was accustomed to the university environment and thrived on the pursuit of knowledge. Many people enter a Ph.D. program with the goal of escaping the public school system. Not me. I also thrived on the daily contact with adolescent students. Believing that their antics, inabilities, and zest for life kept me young and energized, I was no public school burn-out. The novelty of being immersed once again in the university culture was motivational for me. My long commute from Middletown (pseudonym) to the university to attend classes became a form of therapy. Students' antics, inabilities, and zest, although keeping me young and energized, were draining and debilitating me as well--a double-edged sword. The drive in solitude from Middletown to the university provided me with a great deal of time for both relaxation and thought. With time for reflection during my commutes to class, my learning curve was high. Rethinking read texts, meditating on philosophies and theories, reviewing class discussions, and making personal connections consumed much of my drive. This reflective commute contributed to my intrigue with the theories of Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978, 1995), Richard Beach (1990), Michael Polyani (1969), and Clark Moustakas (1990). Always interested in human issues and concepts, Clark Moustakas's (1990) heuristic research design offered me a way of inviting human themes onto the research stage. It provided for me a way of knowing foreign to my rote learning experiences in the classrooms of my past. This heuristic

method allowed me to understand my endless search for knowledge in the English/language arts discipline and my continued re-creation as an English/language arts instructor. Today, I know that the direct "apprenticeship of observation" method of teaching English/language arts that I had employed as a rookie teacher had been an unconscious and necessary approach, for it represented my own evolution and a developing pedagogy. As I gained tacit understanding, my English/language arts approach would again evolve. Each evolution represented a new depth of understanding and way of knowing. I realize today that I could not have gained the depth of understanding and way of knowing that I now have without the students of both my present and past. Likewise, they could not have gained the depth of understanding that they have today without my involvement in their lives. Certainly, other teachers may have offered my students more, but whatever the value of my presence; I was a part of their learning process. Today, I know that, regardless of the discipline, learning is a transactional exchange of connections.

Findings

My search for heuristic reader-response research proved to be an exhaustive yet worthwhile effort. I learned that reader-response involves aesthetic and efferent reading experiences as well as textual, psychological, cultural, social, and experiential elements. While I found no reader-response research that followed the heuristic research design involving initial engagement, immersion, incubation, explication, illumination, and creative synthesis, I did learn that a great deal of information has been written about reading and reader-response approaches. Because I now understand that the experience of reader-response occurs not only as a transactional

experience involving the reader, the text, and the poem, but also as an transactive experience involving those individuals present in the reader-response environment, studies that stifle students' voices have limited classroom implications for me. Because the English/language arts environment, as suggested by this study, influences the opportunity for student connection and apprehension of literature, research results that omit the voices and stories of the students fail to offer a holistic depiction of the learning environment.

By including the voices and stories of students regarding the reader-response experience, the research results offered here present a more holistic depiction of learning in the English/language arts classroom.

Concrete Manifestations of the Reader-response Experience

The results of this search reveal that a *primary concrete manifestation* of the reader-response experience exists. During *primary concrete manifestations*, cold chills, clammy hands, thumping hearts, and elevated body temperatures are exhibited. These *primary concrete manifestations*, evoke moments of intense concentration and mood. Such moments of intense concentration and mood mentally transports readers to past experiences forming a bond with the printed words and allowing for deeper understanding and connection with the text.

Secondary concrete manifestations occur as subjects revisit the memory of books and stories read. These mental journeys transport travelers to remembrances and situations of all types. During these explorations, readers relive primary experiences with books and stories in such a deep way as to elicit secondary concrete responses. Such moments of intense secondary responses allow readers to again bond

with the remembrances of printed words and the knowledge gained from the exploration.

Authenticity

Students feel a need for *authenticity* with what they spend time investigating. They need the material studied to provide a real-world application. The material studied in the English/language arts classroom, therefore, must be relevant to the lives of the inhabitants of that class. Because all classes are not identical, and the real-world outside of the school doors does change, English/language arts teachers must remain in a state of perpetual reflection and analysis in order to meet the needs of each unique and ever-changing class.

Relatedness

Research results reveal that students need to feel related to the material studied in the English/language arts classroom. An individual connection with the prose offers readers stabilization for learning and promotes the development of personal knowledge. Feelings of *relatedness* help readers to make meaning of their lives and help to establish feelings of self-worth.

No doubt, individuals are unique. By nature, the classes that individuals inhabit are unique as well. This uniqueness makes perpetual teacher reflection, analysis, and adjustment an element of major importance for connection and learning in the English/language arts classroom.

Transference

The findings of the research suggest that students yearn to learn. The knowledge that they gain as a result of their yearning, they long to transfer to others

making a difference in lives, cultures, and civilizations. This *transference* of knowledge helps students to "see the big picture and helps [them] learn." (Notation from Rachel's words)

Environment

The results of this search suggest that an accepting and nurturing *environment* will precede any connected reader-response experience. When a positive *environment* is not present, the *authenticity* of literature and *relatedness* to literature will not be found leaving the benefits of *concrete manifestations* and *transference* of knowledge moot points.

My goal has been to add students' and teachers' voices to the English/language arts debate by concurrently dwelling upon the entities of reader-response from both the student and teacher perspectives. This form of indwelling proved to be both liberating and constricting. Although this methodology offered me the latitude to pursue information as areas of relevance immerged, that latitude became confining in the most internal sense. Often, strands of relevance ran in so many different directions, requiring pursuit on a number of fronts, I felt mentally confined to chaotic turbulence and secluded from any form of "knowing". This latitude, though, with time and endurance, proved to be indispensable. It transformed a once chaotic path into a greater way of knowing—a personal knowing—a knowing on many fronts. Today I know that "knowing" is a journey. Those that assisted me in my travels include philosophers, professors, educators, personal acquaintances, and past and present students—everyone in my existential background. Additionally, I realize that the superimposed strands of relevance that I sought, the number of

individuals influencing my journey, and the numerous ways of knowing are representative of *life* itself.

With the help of those encountered along the path of my journey, I was able to realize that it is not the curriculum offered, or the English/language arts approach that is important, but rather it is the ability of that approach to incite a personal way of *knowing*. When the learning experience has not provided a personal way of knowing, then it has been a shallow one of limited use. I now know that all meaningful experiences in the English/language arts classroom are heuristic experiences involving self-apprehension and the acquisition of tacit knowledge. This tacit knowledge is born of each individual's subjective reality. From this reality a personal connection is made and a way of knowing is acquired.

Comparing Philosophies with the Research Results

The theories and philosophies of those individuals most influential to me and this inquiry were presented in greater detail in Chapter 2. Today I realize that the dialogue of those individuals who appear there represent a personal heuristic experience for them and a tacit understanding of the topic of their commentary. My own heuristic discovery brought me to a place of tacit agreement with these researchers. Before this heuristic discovery, I was able to intuitively agree that their theories and philosophies appeared reasonable, yet I was unable to unequivocally concur. Now that I have heuristically explored learning through the reader-response experience, I can attest to the validity of their assertions. I agree with John Dewey (1902) that education in the classroom, no matter the discipline, occurs within the very personal world of the student. When students ask, "Is this book good?" and

"Why do we have to take this test?" they too are supporting Dewey's assertion that education is a personal matter. Statements like this one should inspire each of us to believe in the desire of students to learn. With such statements students implicitly tell us of their need to transact with items that offer authenticity and relatedness.

The findings of my research also support Alfred North Whitehead's (in Cahn, 1997) belief that *life* is the subject matter for all education. My students discussed and wrote about their own lives. As they explained the reader-response experience, it seemed impossible for them to remove themselves from the commentary. The personal pronoun "I" dominated their discussions and writings as they offered personal stories. When Devin wrote about her progression from learning to read to reading to her cousins, she echoed Whitehead's belief that education is life. Her words supported the authenticity, relatedness, and transference findings of this research. The words of these students must not be overlooked. Their words should challenge each educator to recognize that it is the authentic and relevant that leads to learning and ways of knowing. It is the transference of information that exhibits the knowledge acquired and deepens each individuals' way of knowing.

Concern for the social environment of the classroom and workplace supported Paulo Freire's (1987) assertion that reading is preceded by knowledge of the world. Tina echoes Freire's belief when she states that the "perfect reading class would be a happy, fun place to learn. Everyone would be nice to each other, and there wouldn't be any fighting or arguing of any kind allowed. The only things that would be allowed is being nice and reading happily". Additionally, Teacher 3's belief that if

teachers talked more, they would have less stress is another expression of the need for a positive environment, no matter the stage of the life journey.

Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) contention that the classroom is filled with social and cultural issues is evident in the findings as well. Hailey illustrated the notion that students have social and cultural concerns when she wrote, "We would be able to debate our opinions and participate in class debates." Hailey's comments exhibit the existence of personal student opinions. Her desire to explore these opinions in an open forum suggests the desire for a transactive environment and the need to reason through weighty topics of relatedness. This research illustrated that teachers too are aware of social and cultural issues. Their opinions demonstrated this awareness as they spoke of the lack of camaraderie at the school and when they discussed the rising test requirements.

While the findings of this research support the assertions of John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Paulo Freire, and Louise Rosenblatt, an extension beyond their assertions is exhibited by the data presented here. This research suggests that education in the classroom, no matter the discipline, does occur, as John Dewey contends, within the very personal world of the student. Students' thoughts reveal though that the very personal world of the student begins in the classroom setting with the classroom environment.

Alfred North Whitehead's belief that *life* is the subject matter for all education remains true today. The research presented here, however, demonstrates that the classroom environment must be positively developed before student interest in life-like subject matter will grow.

Paulo Freire's assertion that reading is preceded by knowledge of the world becomes crystal clear in the form of students' words. The "perfect reading class would be a happy, fun place to learn…" (Notation from researcher's journal--Tina). This inquiry reveals that reading the world of the classroom environment will take place before reading for mental growth will occur.

Louise Rosenblatt's contention that the classroom is filled with social and cultural issues remains true today. The findings of this search, however, suggest that students' *primal* concern is the environment. Teachers then must attend to the classroom environment with heightened awareness and concern.

The results of this research reveal that a positive *environment* must exist before students will *emotionally* engage in the exploration of what is *authentic* and *related* to their lives. Although student *life* must *be* the curriculum, educators must understand that a positive *environment* precedes *interest*, mental connection, apprehension, and *transference* in the twenty-first century English/language arts classroom.

Conclusions

Implications for Myself as Teacher and Learner

The greatest challenge we face today in the English/language arts classroom is determining our priorities. Do we want to help students mentally grasp topics? If the collective answer is "Yes" then students' voices, regarding how they best comprehend and connect in the English/language arts classroom must be added to the debate. We must learn what is authentic and offers relatedness to students and unique ethnographic classrooms—rather than what is appropriate for a standardized

autocratic procedure devised for the political benefit of the assenting benefactors. With an approach that places students' needs at the top of the list of educational concerns, no attention would have to be given the environment, for it would already be in place. Perhaps some would suggest that this approach is nihilistic in nature. I disagree. My insistence on this stance is necessary to avoid the nihilism of our twenty-first century students. In a politically driven educational atmosphere that today dismisses the voices of those most closely associated with learning and teaching, English/language arts teachers must have the courage to reflect upon and question the mandates and reforms of the day always seeking to hear and understand students' perspectives. By mindlessly following federal, state, and local prescriptives without consulting students, teachers are defeating students, the English/language arts discipline, test scores, and themselves as educators. Constructivist values maintain that students discover and make meaning of their world through active experience and sensations. In constructive learning environments, the individual experience must be authentic and self-directed. English/language arts teachers must resist the prescriptives demanded by mandates and reforms for they degrade individuals and ways of knowing. Life, like the reader-response experience that is transactional, is not meant to be segmented. Life does not feel extraneous. Learning through the reader-response experience should not feel extraneous. Instead it must feel authentic to be meaningful.

The Shadow

The research presented here is a result of a fourteen year search that began my rookie year as a classroom teacher at Orbit (pseudonym). Because my students there

would not engage with my grammar for grammar's sake approach to the English/language arts, yet they would engage with the literature that I read to them in class, an internal conflict and search began. This conflict and search I named "The Shadow". Today I am thankful for "The Shadow" for it represents the evolution of a progressive pedagogy. Without "The Shadow" my English/language arts methodology would remain today a rote, antiseptic, and sterile approach offering students no authenticity or relatedness. "The Shadow" that once consumed me was a heuristic one. A driving force of self-improvement, "The Shadow" propelled me to greater knowledge and ways of knowing and teaching.

I'm fighting a shadow
that steals past the light,
That mocks me
and molds me
and beckons
my flight!
(Copp, 1965)

"The Shadow" that I am today thankful for was once my internal sparing opponent. My continuous romp toward "light" was, however, a futile effort. Without a holistic personal investigation, my subconscious was bound to "mock" me, insisting upon tacit knowledge or encouraging the "flight" of peace. Flight for me though, was an impossibility. Confrontations with myself were necessary. They molded me into a pliable medium for self-actualized understanding.

I once wanted to rid myself of the unnerving shadow. Today I do not. "The Shadow" drove me to deeper understanding. I now believe that the best approach is to invite shadows into my life. I believe that any and all elements of interest left yet

to be understood (and they are numerous) will bring with them a shadow--a shadow of knowledge.

Educational Understandings and Recommendations

To those who find themselves in conflict, and to those interested in education, I would recommend a heuristic journey. A heuristic journey will provide a more holistic understanding. My experience with this heuristic inquiry tells me that we must tacitly understand an issue before we may lead another to tacit understanding.

Today I know that education in the English/language arts classroom is a heuristic experience. There the learner must be placed at the center of a very non-linear equation. Mandates and reforms that rain down upon public schools today remove the learner from the equation disenfranchising those their measures seek to assist. In order to help students achieve, federal and state legislatures, and local organizations and factions must put aside their own agendas and focus on the students and their educational worlds. Those truly interested in helping students achieve must realize that achievement is measured in holistic ways rather than superfluous quantitative data, approval ratings, and voter affirmation. Federal and state legislatures and local organizations and factions must begin to understand that education is personal and that all persons are not the same. Individuals and classes can not be taught in the same manner with success. What federal and state legislators, citizens, teachers, and communities owe our English/language arts students is a positive environment where authentic and related literary elements are explored. In order to accomplish this, English/language arts teachers must be provided a positive environment where the educationally authentic and related is

welcomed. Through a positive environment that welcomes the educationally authentic and related, teachers may accomplish magical things with students.

Summary

In the final analysis, the child must be placed first and foremost in the English/language arts classroom. Teachers must remember that mandates or reforms should not determine the English/language arts curriculum. Cultural teacher reproduction should not determine the English/language arts curriculum. Instead teachers must remember that it is each unique and culturally morphed class that must determine the English/language arts curriculum. It is this unique and culturally bound class that provides the energy for the English/language arts classroom experience. The very personal nature of the ethnographic classroom and reader-response experience suggests the impossibility of effective English/language arts mandates and reforms constructed without the voices of the inhabitants of each unique classroom. The English/language arts classroom must be directed by what is authentic and relevant to those individuals in *each* classroom community and environment. No set of mandates, reforms or prescriptive do's and don'ts can call forth, on demand, English/language arts apprehension or a connected reader-response experience.

Today I know that when the needs of the child are in conflict with the institutional demands, the child's needs must remain the priority. I now realize that the reason I teach *is* the children. When I fail to speak out and stand up for students and am unable to resist defeating institutional prescriptives, it will be time to abandon my *profession* and find a *job,* for it is only the hearty and true of heart that deserve a place in students' lives. Students' lives are far too important to expend.

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Appendix

STUDENT ASSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA-NORMAN CAMPUS

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled*: Chasing the Shadow: A Heuristic Look at Reader Response*. The principal project investigator is Kim A. Harris, a Ph.D. student in the College of Education from the University of Oklahoma is conducting the study under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is intended to describe the study and to request your assent for participation in the study.

The purpose of this research is to examine the experience of reader response from the perspective of the learner and researcher. Reader-response refers to how background knowledge and experiences influence the way people understand what they read. In this study, reader-response will be examined from the perspective of students in grades 7, 8, and/or 9.

The study will be conducted by asking you to respond, through written language, to a set of five questions related to the experience of reader response. These questions will be addressed one question at a time no more than three times a week until all five questions have been addressed by all students who choose to be a part of the study. You will be asked: 1) What makes you interested in a book or story, 2) Once you have begun a book or story, what makes you want to continue, 3) What makes you want to investigate ideas or topics presented in a book or story further?, 4) How did you arrive at your response to a question presented by your school literature text, 5) What process did you go through in your mind as your read the literature in your school adopted literature text? Each response session will take approximately 15-20 minutes but no longer than one class period (50 minutes).

You will be interviewed one time responding to the five questions previously listed. This will be done in order to gain a deeper understanding of your position regarding reader response. These questions will be posed one question at a time. You will be provided time to fully respond to each question. The interview will be tape recorded in order to capture your exact thoughts and feelings regarding reader response so than an accurate portrayal of research results may be possible. This interview response session will take approximately 15-20 minutes but no longer than 30 minutes.

This study will be beneficial because it will help determine what is involved in reader response and it will allow educators to understand how literacy, critical thinking, and student engagement is achieved. The information may impact all educators who seek to improve their teaching methods, yet there will be no direct benefits to student participants.

No foreseeable risks beyond those present in everyday life and classroom activity are anticipated, and no specific personal benefits are anticipated to be associated with this study.

To participate in the study, you must be a student enrolled in an Oklahoma public school system, be at least twelve years of age and not above seventeen years of age. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate without any penalty or loss of any educational privileges that you now experience. Also, you may stop your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of privileges.

You will not be identifiable by name or city in any project publications. You will be identified by pseudonym in published discourse and by numeric codes on preliminary manuscript and coding materials. Kim A. Harris will personally transcribe all information obtained through your participation in order to ensure confidentiality. Kim A. Harris will keep the information under lock in her home.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that protects human participants, at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Principal Investigator, Kim A. Harris, at (580) 332-2086 or Faculty Sponsor, Michael Angelotti, Ph.D., at (405) 325-1463.

Audio Taping of Study Activities: To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

[ ] I consent to the use of audio recording.

[ ] I do NOT consent to the use of audio recording.

I, _____ (print) have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above described research inquiry. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent for participation at any time without penalty.

_____

(Signature)

PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM FOR RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA-NORMAN CAMPUS

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study entitled*: Chasing the Shadow: A Heuristic Look at Reader Response*. The principal project investigator is Kim A. Harris, a Ph.D. student in the College of Education from the University of Oklahoma is conducting the study through the sponsorship of Michael Angelotti, Ph.D. Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. This research study is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is intended to describe the study and to request your consent for your child's participation in the study.

The purpose of this research is to examine the experience of reader response from the perspective of the learner and researcher. Reader-response refers to how background knowledge and experiences influence the way people understand what they read. In this study, reader-response will be examined from the perspective of students in grades, 7, 8, and/or 9.

The study will be conducted by asking students to respond, through written language, to a set of questions related to the experience of reader-response. These questions will be addressed one question at a time no more than three times a week until all five questions have been addressed by all students (who elect to be a part of the study). Students will be asked to respond to 1) What makes you interested in a book or story, 2) Once you have begun a book or story, what makes you want to continue, 3) What makes you want to investigate ideas or topics presented in a book or story further, 4) What process did you go through in your mind as your read the literature? 5) How did you arrive at your response to a question presented by the school adopted literature text? Each response session will take approximately 15-20 minutes but no longer than one class period (50 minutes).

Students will be interviewed one time utilizing the five questions previously listed in order to gain a deeper understanding of students' positions and perspectives regarding reader response. These questions will be posed one question at a time. Students will be provided time to fully respond to each question. The interview will be tape recorded in order to capture students' exact thoughts and feelings regarding reader response so than an accurate portrayal of research results may be possible. This interview response session will take approximately 15-20 minutes but no longer than 30 minutes.

This study will be beneficial because it will help define what is involved in reader response and it will allow educators to understand how literacy, critical thinking, and student engagement is achieved. Through this investigation, a greater understanding of how engaged reader response is produced may be understood. The disclosure set forth by this research may benefit all educators seeking improvement and/or the teaching approaches needed by twenty-first century students, yet there will be no direct benefits to student participants.

No foreseeable risks beyond those present in everyday life and classroom activity are anticipated, and no specific personal benefits are anticipated to be associated with this study.

To participate in the study, your child must be a student enrolled in an Oklahoma public school system, be at least twelve years of age and not above seventeen years of age. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to NOT have your child participate in this research without any penalty or loss of educational privileges that he/she now experiences. Also, he/she may stop participation at any time without any penalty or loss of privileges.

Your child will not be identifiable by name or city in any project publications. Your child will be identified by pseudonym on published discourse and by numeric codes on preliminary manuscript and coding materials. Principal Investigator, Kim A. Harris will be the only person who has access to the research material and this material will be kept in a locked file cabinet at her home. Additionally, she will personally transcribe all information obtained through your child's participation in order to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that protects human participants, at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Kim A. Harris, Principal Investigator at (580) 332-2086 or Faculty Sponsor, Michael Angelotti, Ph.D., at (405) 325-1463.

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[ ] I consent to the use of audio recording.

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I, _____ (print) have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree for my child to participate in the above described research inquiry. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent for his or her participation at any time without penalty.

_____

(Signature)